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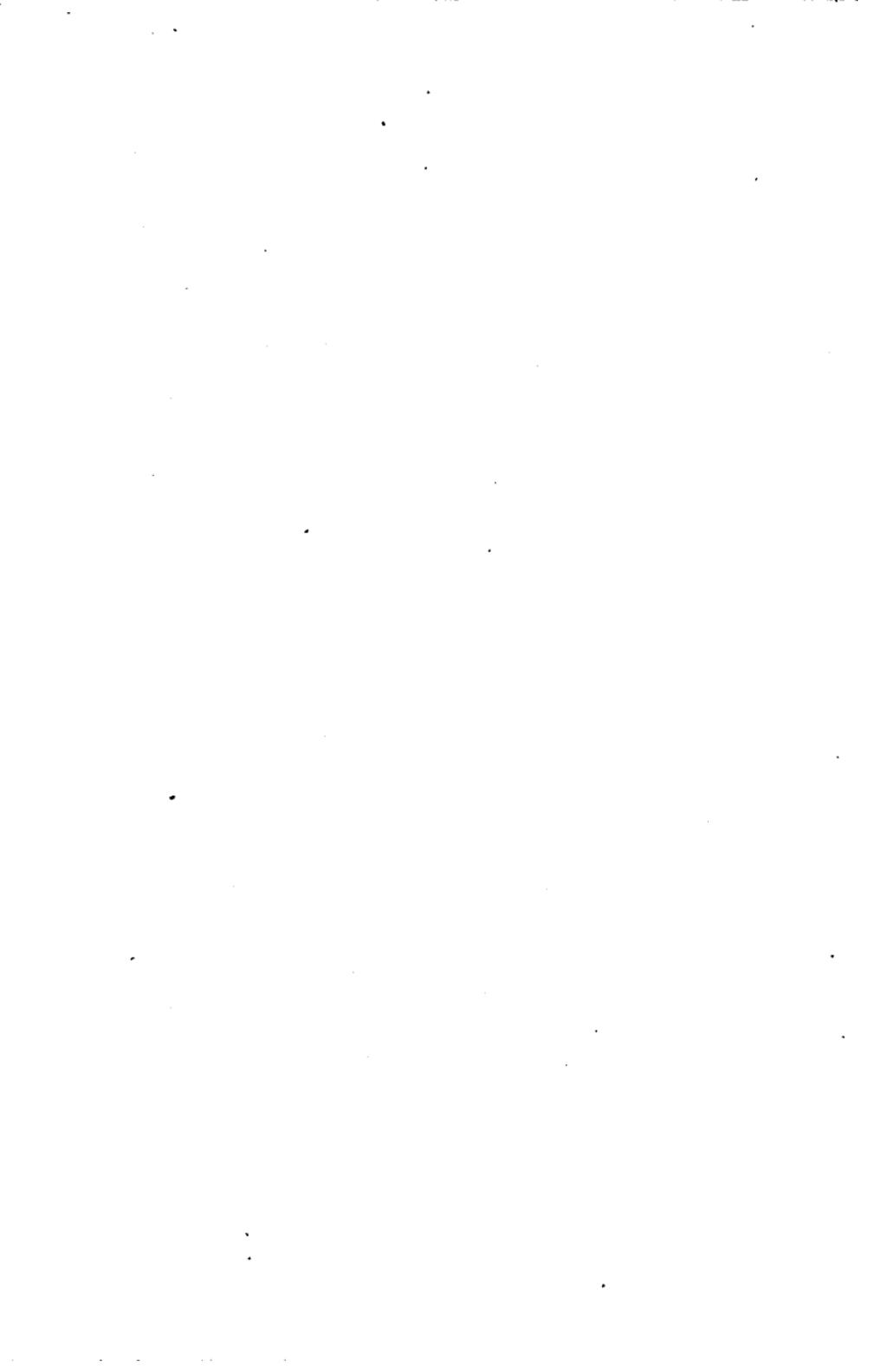
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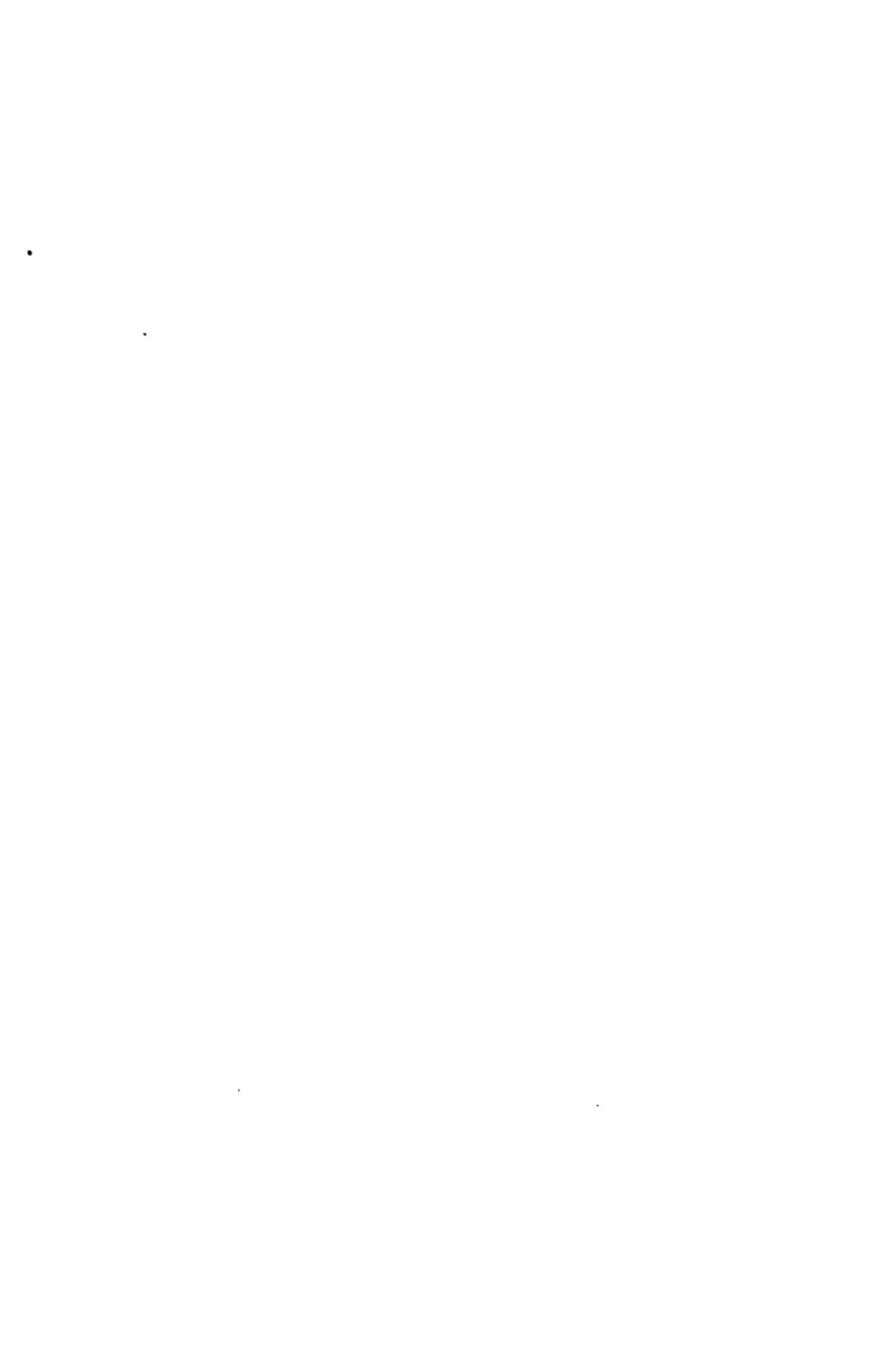
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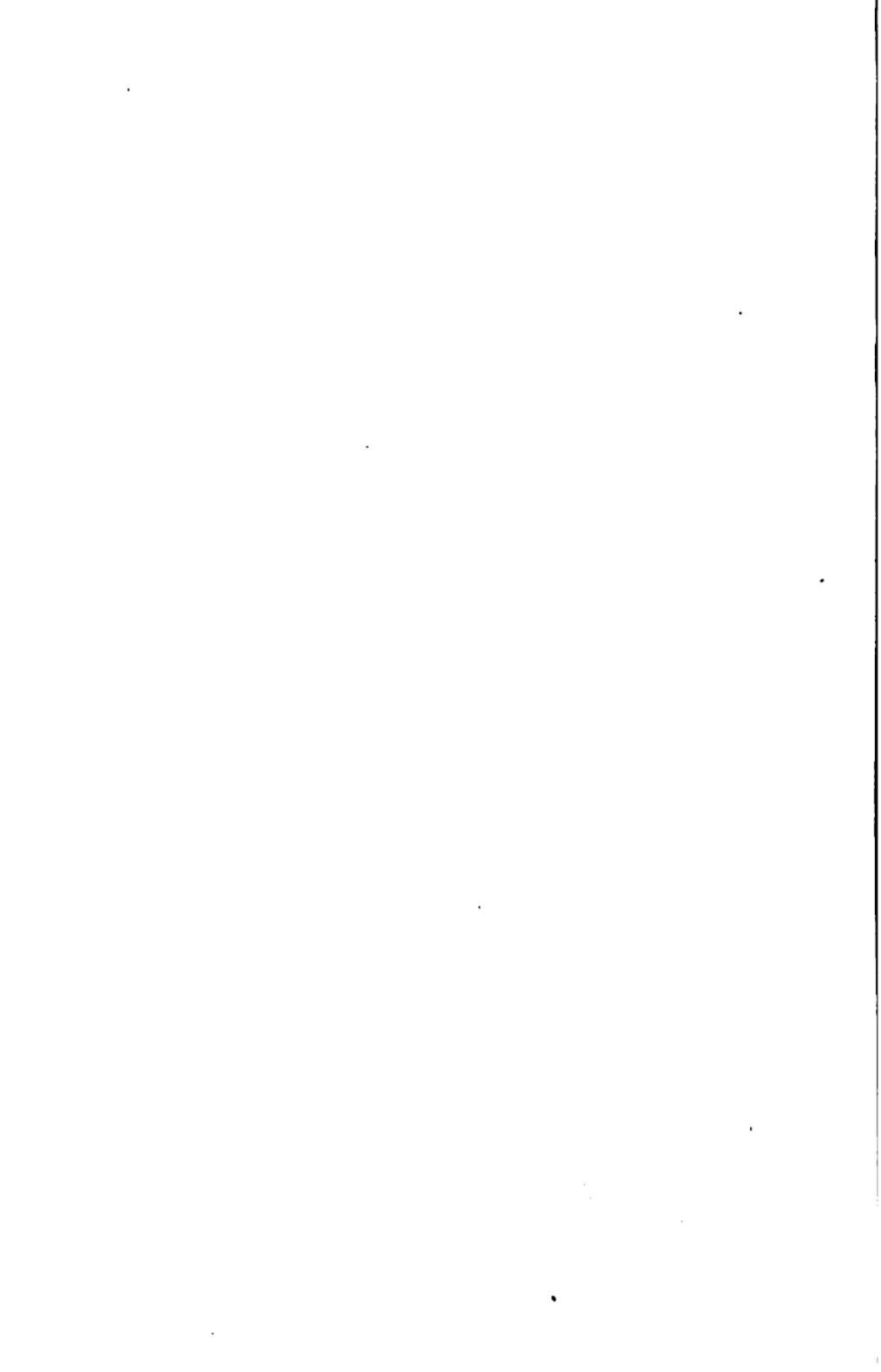
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IN SHALLOW WATERS.

PART I.

LESS THAN FRIENDS.

CHAPTER I.

THE HOUSEHOLD AT THE STEPPING STONES.

AGNES LEAKE's departure for Australia created much interest in the little world which had known her from a child. Even the marriage of her sister Kate failed to be regarded as a more considerable event. Agnes had always been a pretty, gentle creature, full of fastidious sensibilities, and noticeable for her refined taste. Her brothers and sisters had spoilt her ; her friends had humoured her ; she was young enough and sweet enough to be pardoned

some caprices, and to be indulged in many innocent fancies. She had been protected from the roughnesses of life, and her natural shrinking from unpleasant experiences had, therefore, rather increased than diminished as she developed from childhood to delicate girlhood. She was not clever, but she had various pleasant accomplishments, a sweet voice, a soft touch, and a gently entreating manner. More than one man had admired her, perhaps beyond her deserts; but, in spite of her apparent softness and yielding tenderness, her affections were not readily gained. So at least it seemed when she refused, one after the other, four suitors, whose advances were favoured by her family.

It is true that her sisters were consoled in each case by feeling that Agnes might do better. Her first lover was a young man only a couple of years older than herself, who fell in love with her girlish prettiness; and her sister Susie remarked that, if Agnes had accepted him, they would have been,

after all, only a couple of children together. Then there was a middle-aged suitor, old enough to be her father, who would have been admirably adapted to guide and cherish her youthful inexperience. But—in the light of her rejection of this marriage—it was seen by her friends to have threatened a serious sacrifice of that gaiety to which her age entitled her.

When a London barrister, a friend of her brother's, offered her, on the other hand, a somewhat brilliant social position, it was readily perceived—by means of her reluctance to avail herself of this opportunity—that a life of festivity and perpetual entertainment was unsuited to her domestic habits.

The unexpected surrender to her sweetness of a neighbouring vicar, who was neither too old nor too young, too rich nor too poor, seemed to leave at last no proper pretext for Agnes Leake's refusal to marry; but she discovered that he was "too good;" she was as much dismayed and horrified at

his proposal as if the pulpit itself, in which she had often heard him preach, had made her an offer of marriage. Then her sisters became at once aware that he was very strict in his views, and that much visiting of poor parishioners, and attendance on early services, would be injurious to Agnes. As on other occasions, they perceived that a happy instinct had saved her from accepting a position in which she would ultimately suffer, and they were glad to keep her at home a little longer.

It was somewhat remarkable that so many men should place themselves at the disposal of this one girl, whose prettiness was of no brilliant sort ; but, while her manners were sweet enough to suggest an easy conquest of her affections, her character was passive enough for most men to fit their own ideal upon, and to see it as they would like it to be. It is probable that none of them, except, perhaps, the youngest of all, would have committed themselves so easily to a definite offer of marriage, if they had not

felt a pleasant assurance of meeting with no obstacle beyond a little charming shyness. They were all as much surprised at being refused as Agnes was at being proposed to, although, on thinking it over, none of them could remember what had been the grounds of his over-confidence. The fact was that the negative sweetness of Agnes Leake's manner was as favourable to the encouragement of a pleasant illusion as was the passiveness of her character. She was without ardent imagination or intellectual ambition. Her affection was of a clinging, demanding sort—not passionate, not daring, not speculative, nor venturesome. She loved the things and persons to whom she was accustomed, because in intercourse with these there was no fear of unpleasant surprises. She was quite happy at home, and shrank from the thought of a new start in life, which would compel her to a readjustment of her habits and also of her emotions. She was not yet old enough to have experienced any dropping away of early ties,

6 *THE HOUSEHOLD AT THE STEPPING STONES.*

therefore she had no idea of the necessity of forming new ones to replace them.

She had two brothers and four sisters, all older than herself. Susie, the eldest of the sisters, had been for many years a careful mother to the others ; Anna and Ellen represented the serious element in the family, intellectual and religious, but not very deeply so ; while Kate and Agnes were the household darlings, and close companions of one another.

When Agnes was nineteen, Kate astonished her by accepting the proposal of Mr. John Langford (commonly called "Jack"), and promising to go to Australia as his wife. Kate was considered by her friends more brilliant and accomplished than Agnes, but her beauty had failed to procure for her in so high a degree that accepted social diploma of womanly success—the admiration of many men. Perhaps Agnes was at first disappointed to find that her favourite sister accepted so readily the opportunity of changing her name and home ; but she

soon learnt to look upon the engagement as a pleasant experience, novel and enjoyable in its reflected interest.

A separation from Kate would have been undoubtedly painful to her, but it was arranged that she should accompany the young couple to Australia, and spend a year with them there. Susie hoped that this interval of absence and change would break the keenness of the parting between the two sisters, and that Agnes would return home less wedded to old circumstances, and not so firmly resolved against any step which must take her permanently into a new home and a new circle.

Meanwhile, strange as it might seem, Agnes showed little reluctance to leave England in this way. The change which had seemed wholly beyond her power to accept, when it was offered in the form of marriage to herself, came as a natural thing to her when it was a consequence of the marriage of Kate. Kate was bright, brave, and full of spirit; Agnes watched

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her and listened to her with a pleasant admiration as the preparations for departure went forward. For Agnes seemed to enjoy the idea of a new household, where Kate—her companion and equal—would be the head, and even looked forward with pleasure to the long voyage she was to take under the sheltering wing of her sister. The whole affair brought back to her memory pleasant holidays of childhood, when Susie had given consent to some unwontedly bold undertaking on the part of the two youngest sisters, and Agnes had followed the daring inspirations of Kate, and been protected by her superior spirit. Now, as then, she was still to be the “little one,” having no importance as an actor, but every importance as a person to be taken care of; and this was the position to which she was accustomed, and which she did not care to change for any other.

Nevertheless, her elder sisters hoped that this new experience would give her the self-confidence she required, and cure her

of too strong an attachment to her old home.

Marriage, they all thought, would be "so suitable" for Agnes. Miss Leake—Susie—thought so with especial decision ; though marriage had never entered into her ideas as something desirable for herself. She was happily occupied in the management of a household, and in filling the important position of elder sister to a large family. The house which she occupied with her sisters was her own, her income was a little larger than theirs ; therefore she had that power of being generous, and that right to decide, which add so much to the natural influence of seniority. The same absorption in family affection which rendered Agnes indifferent to her suitors had also kept Miss Leake from wandering into any of those bypaths of sympathy and friendship which often lead to matrimony. But her family affection was of the kind which is occupied in giving, instead of that which is satisfied in receiving. In spite of handsome looks

and pleasant manners, she had attracted no man sufficiently to encourage him to attempt to overcome her evident indifference. A capable woman who has found her destiny and is wholly satisfied with it, is ordinarily —except in her earliest youth—as safe from the attentions of lovers as a happily married wife. There is something in the perpetual pre-occupation of her mind in her chosen duties, something also in the non-expectation of her manners, which effectually exclude the possibility of those sympathetic awakenings to an interest in another life, which—oftener than mere grace and beauty —make the beginning of passionate attachments. A capable woman *not* completely occupied by her chosen life is in a different position; but Miss Leake had always been actively and evidently content in her own little circle. One member of it after another was continually requiring her kind attention, her thoughtful care, her wise advice. She was always arranging, working, scheming, for the welfare of her

younger sisters ; and if some suitor, spurred by his appreciation of her devotion to her family, had suggested that she should transfer that devotion to himself, she would have listened with mere wonder and indignation at his presumption.

But her plans for her sisters were not laid out on the pattern of her own life. It was as natural for her to hope for new homes and new interests on their behalf as it would have been to reject them on her own. It had been an unspoken disappointment to her that Anna and Ellen remained so long under her roof. Ellen had, indeed, once been weak enough to receive with too much encouragement the attentions of a poor curate, but that affair had happily, under the chilling discountenance of Miss Leake herself, come to nothing. It was a little provoking that no more eligible suitor had “come forward” on behalf of either of the two sisters next to herself in age. They were not very important personages in themselves ; she would have

liked to see them shining in reflected importance as heads of prosperous households. Kate's engagement was therefore an unmitigated satisfaction to her; for Mr. Langford's family was good, and his means were good, although he was a younger son. She did not waste regrets over Kate's departure for Australia; a dozen years abroad would do the girl no harm, she thought; and she well knew that all the members of her family could not find prosperous settlements within the narrow range of Elmdale. Of her two brothers, the elder already practised in London as a barrister, the younger had gone out to India a couple of years ago. It was an actual satisfaction to Miss Leake to send branches of her household to take root abroad and return from time to time to the quiet valley where she planned their lives, and from which she watched their careers. Kate was, she considered, just the girl for a colonist, full of the cheerful enjoyment of youth, and eager to find plea-

sure in every new experience. She had no doubts or fears on her behalf.

The season in Elmdale which preceded Kate's marriage was a bright and happy one. The household at "The Stepping Stones," as Miss Leake's pretty residence was called, was full of gaiety and cheerful preparations. The dull monotony of ordinary existence in the valley was overcome by the sunshine of happy circumstances. The coming and going of the future bridegroom, the visits of friends, and all the arrangements and preparations in which Miss Leake delighted, filled the last months with interest and pleasure.

Miss Leake revelled in an atmosphere of social prosperity. She was pleased (and secretly proud) that Kate's wedding should come at the right time and in the right way. She always felt herself responsible to the world for what occurred in her household; all events there should come like seasonable and well-ripened fruit; bearing signs of inward health and outward sunshine, having

the fine bloom as well as the sweet flavour which testified that they were fruits of a good stock. Marriage should come at a suitable age to those who were destined for it, just as preserving or house-cleaning should be done in the proper season. The outward fitness of things was considered important by Miss Leake, and consoled her sometimes for much inward inconvenience. Better to be uncomfortable privately than to apologize publicly: such was her secret theory. Therefore everything was properly ordered in her household and properly arranged in her sisters' education.

She had secured for them "the best instruction" to a moderate extent. They were not permitted to be altogether ignorant of anything that might be spoken of or written about in polite society. Their knowledge was undoubtedly superficial, and their accomplishments did not go far in any direction; but there was nothing Miss Leake desired less than to make them prodigies. She wished them to move easily and sucess-

fully in life, as she conceived it, and she secured to them what she regarded as the necessary instruction to this end. They were human pegs carefully rounded to fit without difficulty into comfortable holes, and—having rounded the pegs—she was glad that they should justify her forethought by slipping without difficulty into the places open to them.

She did not admire clever girls, and was never enthusiastic in her praise of good ones; those at least who were specially marked out as such by their parochial visitations and love of week-day services. She never spoke openly against these devotees; her disapprobation took the form of compassion in public; for religion was one of her own chief supports, both socially and mentally; but then she always kept it, like everything else, “in its proper place.” She was inclined to insinuate that any one who made a very visible application of herself to heavenly things must be drawn thereto by a lack of earthly prosperity. It had never been

necessary for herself or any member of her family to make an interest in her life out of ordinances and ceremonials; the proper conduct of her affairs, the attention to her “daily duties,” had been sufficient.

“Poor thing!” she would say of a girl who distributed tracts too freely; “she has been very unfortunate. No doubt it occupies her mind.” Or she would remark of another whose attendance at all the church services was becoming too prominent: “Poor girl! Yes. She has such bad health; all her brothers had.”

Her sister Anna was a little too clever for her taste, having shown some slight inclination to study after leaving school. Her sister Ellen had also disappointed her a little. She had exhibited an early tendency to that superlative goodness which may be better developed in later life, when it has been clearly proved that no other course is to be followed—no other *duty*, Miss Leake would have said. She had no good opinion of those who sought to be amateurs in social life,

picking their own work, and addicted to over much charity when they ought to have been making themselves useful in their own homes. She was a great supporter and admirer of her vicar, but she had such strong opinions on this and similar points that she was frequently a thorn in his side. She would not permit a word to be said against his sermons by any member of her household ; but she would not yield a jot to his opinion on any affair of her own.

Kate was allowed to teach in the Sunday school, but Agnes was pronounced "not strong enough ;" and Kate's Sunday duties were not permitted to interfere with the length of any visit or to be fulfilled at any risk. A wet day, or scarlet-fever in the village, left the vicar to dispose of her class as he could. Also, Miss Leake subscribed very willingly to refuges for the destitute and reformatories for the criminal classes ; but she distinctly declined to give a supper to any ragged boys in her kitchen, or to attempt the conversion of any pilfering girl into a good

servant. She had a strong fund of "common sense," which guided her safely through many difficulties without providing her with any good reason for the course she followed ; and she had a certain mental acuteness, which kept her alive to the state of polite taste and opinion on matters which she had never studied deeply herself. She was aware of the value of her own sound sense, and careful not to wander far into the dangerous regions of argument. She relied upon character and conduct as the weights to give value to her spoken opinion ; and in her own circle she was regarded as a very great authority.

She was an authority which her younger sisters had never questioned. All her arrangements concerning them were so obviously for their own benefit, that it would have been unreasonable to receive them with any demur. She was even over-indulgent to the two younger ones, having learnt to regard their happiness and comfort as of absolute and not relative value. She seemed

to forget that they had any duty in the world except to make the very best of it, and to find as much enjoyment there as possible. When they were emancipated from study, she supplied them with pleasure as diligently as she had once supplied them with tasks, and was anxious that they should apply themselves as heartily to the one as they had done to the other. She had, indeed, the same healthy delight in seeing young people happy that she had in seeing trees bloom or downy chickens plume themselves in the sunshine ; and she was a little inclined to forget, now that the passage of years had taken her from the regions of girlhood, that even those happy years had their own responsibilities, and could not be accepted as mere opportunities of enjoyment.

She was very proud of Kate, who was full of a bright talent which it would be unkind to call superficial, because it was genuine and unaffected as far as it went. Miss Leake classed her as “ brilliant,” in speaking of her to her friends, and took care that her fine

voice should be well trained, and her tall young figure handsomely dressed.

But she was fondest of Agnes, the "home-bird," the child who never had an opinion of her own, nor a desire which it would be difficult to gratify. Kate sometimes made a light struggle over a minor point, such as what dress she ought to wear on a particular occasion, for she had brought back new ideas from her boarding-school; but Agnes took all directions sweetly, and would almost have given up the chance of an entertainment if she had been compelled to decide what dress she must go in.

Was it wonderful, then, that Miss Leake loved her best, and parted from her most reluctantly, though it was for two years only?



CHAPTER II.

TWO SISTERS.

AGNES decided that it was a delightful thing to be a bridesmaid. She liked the secondary importance which it gave to her, the share in the glory of the occasion without responsibility or thrilling experiences. She didn't want to be thrilled, but only to be mildly and gently stimulated, to have a minor part in a great performance, and to peep round the principal personage at the admiring spectators. And Kate was so admirably fitted to be a principal! It was wonderful, beautiful, to look at her and to think of the plunge into life that she was about to take.

It was pleasant also to make acquaintance with the new brother-in-law, and to admire the degree to which Kate—who,

after all, knew him so very little—was at her ease with him.

He was the son of an old friend who lived in Elmdale, and he had become known to the girls within the last few months while on a visit to his parents.

The situation was to Agnes very interesting, slightly amusing, and altogether incredible. How *could* Kate call this stranger “Jack,” and agree to go with him to the other end of the world? The proceeding entertained her, because she was not involved in the risk of it, and could always come home if she didn’t like her life abroad. She was not much given to laughter, but she did laugh softly from time to time when she looked at her sister and said, “Why, Kate, you can’t be married; you’re just *Kate*.”

On account of a supposed delicacy of health, which had never, however, resulted in any serious illness, Agnes had been spared the hardening and informing experience of a boarding-school; but Kate

had enjoyed the advantages and disadvantages of one for more than a year. She had consorted with other girls of her own age, massed together under restrictive conditions highly incitant to every sort of innocent foolishness and indiscretion. Marriage was not to her that wonderful, incomprehensible out-of-the-way thing that it seemed to Agnes. She had seen it looked forward to as promotion ; she had heard it treated as a jest.

“ How foolish you are ! ” she said to Agnes ; “ every one gets married ; it is far odder *not* to do. Would you be an old maid ? ”

“ Why not ? ” answered Agnes. “ Susie is, I suppose.”

“ But every one is not like Susie. All women have not her character, nor position. It would be much better if Anna and Ellen were married ; and I know that is Susie’s opinion.”

“ Do you think so ? ” asked Agnes, in amazement. Until Kate had achieved the

position of an engaged young woman, she had never thus expressed herself.

“I am sure of it. All the girls at school thought it *dreadful* to be an old maid.”

“But you said they were silly, most of them.”

“So they were. But every one thinks the same. Don’t you notice how Robert, every time he comes from London, says ‘Let me see, Anna, how old are you?’ That’s what he means, of course.”

“Is it indeed? and do you think, Kate,” Agnes went on, with awe and wonder in her voice, “*they would have liked it themselves?*”

“Of course they would. You don’t expect them to say so. How can they like, at their age, having no house of their own, no servant—no anything?” The last item was probabiy meant to stand for Jack.

“But why should they? I don’t see it,” said Agnes. “A house is a trouble, and so are servants.”

“Pooh!” said Kate.

“Then why didn’t they?” asked Agnes, apparently convinced by the last argument.

“Yes, why?” repeated Kate, twisting her engagement ring round her finger with a little air of superiority. “Well, you know, I think they might have done, if they had been sensible. They could not have found any one like Jack, of course; that wasn’t to be expected. Why did Anna poke into all those foolish books? and Ellen into all those cottages? Making people paupers, as Susie says. And then there was the *curate*”—with an accent of supreme contempt very becoming in a young lady about to be married to Mr. Jack Langford—“I don’t wonder Susie was vexed.”

“The curate! and was she vexed?” asked Agnes, in some excitement. “You never told me about these things before.”

“We were supposed not to know; and then it isn’t nice to talk continually about getting married—like those foolish girls at school.”

Agnes understood that a licence was

now permitted to Kate which did not extend to herself; so she let the subject drop.

Kate was, at this period, highly satisfied with life. She was convinced that it contained everything necessary to happiness for persons who were not stupid. She herself was highly successful, so she considered, and it was the fault of other people if they were not so. Her prospects at the moment entirely satisfied her. She was very fond of Jack, and she was tired of Elmdale. She liked the idea of having a house of her own, and of giving orders to servants without considering whether they were strictly reasonable; she was also delighted to travel. She was not unwilling, too, to escape from the kindly supervision of Susie; and she did not consider herself appreciated in Elmdale. On the arrival of some one from the great world—for instance, Jack—her superiority had been at once discovered, and her proper place given to her. It was nice,

too, to think that she might be pleasantly unreasonable to other people besides servants, that she could speak disrespectfully to Jack, and show a little temper at times, and yet that he seemed to like her all the better for it. Also she hoped to be able to spend a little money foolishly, to buy dresses that Susie never would have approved of, and to do as she liked generally.

And then to take Agnes under matronly wing, and introduce her to the world—how pleasant that would be! It was pleasant already to see the flushed wonder of that sweet young timidity at the easy coolness with which she received Jack's devotion. To be bright, to be imperious, to be impertinent—as only a young married woman in the first glow of happy importance can venture to be—this was pleasant to look forward to in the future, and to rehearse a little in the present. It would have lost some of its charm had the happy comedy been without a spectator from that past in which she

had lived under Susie's jurisdiction ; and what more desirable spectator could she have had than the wondering, sympathetic, admiring, submissive Agnes ?

Therefore the marriage and all its secondary results were satisfactory to everybody concerned. The ceremony, when it took place, was pronounced brilliantly successful, and repaid Miss Leake for all the trouble and forethought which she had bestowed upon it.

The young couple went away for a brief wedding journey, and Agnes was left at home meanwhile with her elder sisters. But she had no time for overmuch thought of her own approaching departure. Her outfit had to be finished and her boxes packed. Her gentle spirit was not insensible to the delight of the excessive attention which she received at this time, nor to the charms of those superlatively pretty dresses which were being made for her in a profusion justifiable only in a case of marriage or "going abroad." Every one said

that she looked so well in them: the servants especially, who obtained glimpses when she was being "tried on" (making errands into the room on purpose), pronounced her altogether lovely, and quite superior to the bride. For the beauty of Agnes was of the sort which always appeals most to the imaginations of those who work with their hands, and who believe that the special characteristics of a lady are, first, to have the right to do nothing, and, secondly, to use that right to the utmost. It was evident that Agnes never could be very useful, in any way, to anybody; she was too sensitive and helpless. Therefore she was all the more admirable as a pretty young lady, having a type of attractiveness which never could be rivalled by the most fascinating of housemaids or cooks.

In a fortnight Kate came home again. She was by no means subdued by her change of name and position. She made the most of her actual emancipation from the control of Susie, and adopted a pretty

independence of manner, which charmed every one by its novelty, and seemed to fit excellently with the fresh bridal dresses which no one expected to wear very well or to last very long. She patronized Agnes, who was still in her old bondage, while she herself was absolutely at liberty; the possible subduing power of the future—namely, Jack—was only an eager servant still.

In the presence of her bright hopefulness even the parting could not be very sad. Agnes looked about her with bewilderment as the last kisses were given, for she could not realize that she was actually leaving her old home and protectors. She would have broken down into tears and sorrow if any one had given her encouragement or set her the example. But no one did. Miss Leake had specially warned Anna and Ellen beforehand: “We must keep up for the sake of Agnes; poor child!”—and so no one wept or looked miserable.

Robert Leake accompanied the young

people to Liverpool, and saw them on board. On the journey there he talked to his brother-in-law with matter-of-fact cheerfulness of the arrangements for the voyage. Kate put in a word now and then. She was in high spirits, and had no need to feign a composure she did not feel. Agnes stole many a wandering glance at her. Did she really feel like that? she wondered. Was it foolish to be sorry to go away? She tried to follow the example of the others, and not to imagine herself unhappy. They paid every attention to her comfort, and thought it best to ignore her probable feelings.

She marvelled nevertheless that Kate should show such an interest in the fittings of the ship, when there would be plenty of time to think of these afterwards. She often looked wistfully at Robert, and tried to invent new farewell messages to Susie, but couldn't think of any that were not foolish. When the last good-bye was said, and Kate declared brightly:

“I shall make Jack bring me home on a visit before long; and then I shall have lots to tell them at home; of course I haven’t now:” Agnes could find no message but this to send:

“Tell them I said good-bye many times over, and sent them my love, and thought of them all the way here.”

“How foolish of you!” cried Kate; “what’s the good of travelling if your mind is in Elmdale all the time?”

Nevertheless Robert forwarded both messages conscientiously, in a letter from London to “The Stepping Stones;” and they were thought of sadly afterwards when it was known that Kate would never come back to Elmdale to tell the story of her married life, and no friend or sister hoped to see again the gentle face of Agnes in the home she had regrettfully left.



CHAPTER III.

NOT A FIRST-CLASS PASSENGER.

AGNES was melancholy for a day and a half after leaving England; then her regrets began to yield to the cheerful interest of her surroundings, and she was able to perceive the sense of her sister's reasoning.

“It’s so absurd of you, Agnes, to look miserable because you can’t have everything at once. Nobody can. It isn’t in the nature of things. If you go on at this rate you’ll become more unhappy the more enjoyments you know of. I do think you’re a very lucky girl. You know you never would have made up your mind to get married and go away yourself; but I have taken all the trouble off your hands, married Jack, and brought you.”

“I know it’s very good of you,” said

Agnes with becoming meekness, "and of Jack too."

"Good of Jack!" interrupted Kate, opening her eyes widely; "good of Jack to marry me! Good gracious, Agnes, if you think such a fearful thing, don't give utterance to it, at least in the presence of Jack himself. The nature of man is so full of conceit that he'll perhaps come to believe it if you tell him it is so."

Jack laughed, and Agnes hastened to explain, "I don't mean that. I mean good to take me with you."

"What nonsense! Jack's very glad that I have a sister who'll come. Perhaps I never would have come away without. You're very glad, aren't you, Jack?"

"Awfully glad," said Jack, with every appearance of sincerity.

On the whole Agnes found that it was easier, as well as pleasanter, to be cheerful than to be melancholy. The weather was beautiful, and no one was ill. There were passengers on board whom Kate pro-

nounced to be "nice people," and Kate herself became a little queen in the small society thus thrown together at hazard. Her style was perhaps more suitable to the young married woman than to the girl at home. Certainly she obtained more general admiration now than she had done in Elmdale. There, Agnes, in spite of her timidity and shyness, had received the larger share of popular, and especially of masculine, applause. Kate Langford's piquant ways and audacious occasional impertinences achieved, however, a success which had not been granted to Kate Leake. It is natural for a very young girl just married to imagine that, because she has charmed her husband, she is charming to every one else; and society is ready to judge her leniently on the occasion, and even, for a time at least, to take her on her own valuation. Kate's vivacity undoubtedly eclipsed her sister's sweetness in those pleasant first weeks of the voyage; and there were no disagreeable results, because

Agnes was incapable of jealousy. Admiration was only valuable to her when it bore fruit in affectionate care and thoughtful kindness; therefore she was glad when her sister received those superfluous marks of it which only embarrassed herself. Flattery was perplexing, and purely complimentary attentions were troublesome to her. The position of second to an interesting part suited her well; she liked to watch, with bright-eyed wonder, the saucy airs of her sister, and to listen to her audacious chatter. In return Kate caressed and teased her in a pleasantly patronizing manner, standing between her and the rest of the world, so that she received that tempered sunshine of society and gaiety which she most enjoyed.

Jack, meanwhile, watched with an indolent complacency the little comedy of his wife's success. It was very natural that "fellows" should admire her and, doubtless, envy him. At the same time, as the prize was already won, as he

had secured his "innings" beyond the utmost ambition of the rest of the world, he was disinclined to enter the lists on a level with his wife's more recent adorers ; so he used to smoke his pipe and watch proceedings in the most approved matrimonial fashion, or stroll away to have a chat with one of the sailors.

"Isn't it an odd thing?" he said one day, when he came back to his wife's side, "there's a fellow on board who came over to England with me. A capital fellow he is, too ; I took an awful fancy to him as we came home. Knows an immensity about the country and farming and that sort of thing. It's quite a treat to talk to him."

"What's his name, and why haven't we seen him?" asked his wife.

"His name's Dilworth, and you're not likely to have noticed him. He's not a first-class passenger."

"Oh!" said Kate, opening her eyes, "is he very poor, then?"

"I don't know ; I should rather think

not. I fancy he's been a farmer out there ; but he seems to have gone in for a good deal of up-country travelling in his time."

" Is he—a gentleman ? "

" Well, I suppose not ; no, not what you would call so. But a very nice fellow all the same."

Kate showed no further curiosity concerning her husband's new, or old, acquaintance. He did not belong to her world evidently. Farming and up-country travelling might be interesting to Jack, but did not seem to her attractive topics of conversations. Nevertheless she was not to remain long a stranger to Mr. Dilworth.

In the midst of the monotony of life on board ship considerable excitement was caused by the successful attempt to catch a shark, which had followed the ship for a couple of days, to the great uneasiness of the crew. All the passengers crowded to watch the event, and Kate among them.

" What a big man there is in the boat with the sailors," she remarked to her

husband, "and he seems the most active of all."

"Oh, that's Dilworth. He's always to the front when anything's going forward," Jack answered.

Kate watched him with more interest than she had felt before, and she soon had an opportunity of speaking to him.

The dead shark was hauled on deck, and the ladies crowded round to look and shudder. Henry Dilworth stood by, answering questions and making an occasional remark. He seemed interested in the interest they showed, and inclined to enlighten their ignorance by some intelligent information. They, on the other hand, regarded the whole scene as a show got up for their amusement, and Henry Dilworth as the showman.

Kate was, as usual, a prominent figure among the others, full of curiosity, and making disjointed inquiries of every sort ; while Agnes stood shrinking behind her, gazing in turn at the fish and its captor,

as if she regarded them equally as wonders. Henry Dilworth looked down on the shark, his hands in his pockets, the tallest man present, half a head taller than Jack, who was nevertheless a fine, well-built young fellow.

"He's an ugly beast," he remarked, giving the shark a slight touch with his foot; "one of the nastiest there is. He's an enemy no man can have a fellow-feeling for. Yet he can't help it, poor creature! How's he to live else?"

Kate listened, glancing at him with a kind of impersonal observation, which did not commit her to any recognition; then she looked at her husband, shrugged her pretty shoulders, and remarked, just as if he had been speaking last, "He'd far better die; why should he live? '*Je n'en vois pas la nécessité*,' as that Frenchman said, you know."

Henry Dilworth's eyes fell upon her; if he was a personality whom she declined to recognize, she was a phenomenon he did

not understand. She belonged to a phase of life which he had never cared to study. Nevertheless there was something in her deliberate way of watching and listening to him, only to address a reply to some one else, which made a decided impression upon him. He was too indifferent to feel hurt ; but he seemed to have received his dismissal, therefore he gave that one silent glance and walked away.

Jack was not quite so pleased with his wife's vivacity as usual.

“ Why did you do that, Kate ? ” he asked.

“ I ? ” she said, lifting her eyebrows. “ I did nothing.”

“ It was a very impressive sort of nothing. Why did you speak French, for one thing ? Dilworth doesn't understand it, of course. I don't think you were quite polite to him. He's not a showman, you know.”

“ Who said he was, you cross creature ? I wouldn't be *rude*, of course, to any one ;

but why should I be *polite* to that sort of man? He doesn't expect it."

"For your own satisfaction, I should think.

"Well, I will in future," Kate answered, taking her rebuke gaily, "as he seems to be such a friend of yours; and all the more as he's a very handsome man of his kind, which you never mentioned to us."

"Do you call him handsome?" Agnes asked. "He's so very big!"

"Little simpleton," Kate retorted, pinching her sister's cheek. "You think because you're small yourself that nobody who's big can be good-looking. Now, I call this man—what's his name? Dilworth —this Mr. Dilworth, simply splendid. You do see that type sometimes among common men."

"I shouldn't call him exactly a common man," Jack protested, for he had taken a greater liking to his rough friend than to his wife's polite admirers. "I should say that on the whole he's very uncommon."

“It’s much the same thing,” Kate declared, “common or uncommon. He’s not *usual*; he’s not what we’ve all been taught to be from our earliest years upwards.”

“If you mean that he can’t speak foreign tongues,” Jack began, and his wife laughingly put in the exclamation—“Oh, how spiteful you are! I would never have married you if I’d known it.”

“You are probably right,” he went on gravely. “But I call his manners really good—not of the drawing-room sort, of course.”

“Hardly,” Kate answered drily. “I wonder what Susie would say, for example, if you invited him to dinner?”



CHAPTER IV.

HENRY DILWORTH'S PAST.

KATE was never willing to acknowledge herself in the wrong, even to Jack, whose judgment had been proved so superior to that of the rest of the world by his choice of a wife. She never yielded a battle, but she changed her ground as soon as the contest was over, when she thought that her movements were unobserved. She was too fond of Jack, and too anxious that he should think all she did admirable, not to mould her actions unconsciously to his opinions, however she might verbally oppose them.

Therefore, on the next occasion that she met Mr. Dilworth she was very gracious to him, a little too much so for perfect politeness perhaps (the politeness in which

there is no kind of condescension), but her husband was easily pleased and did not detect the shade too much in her manner; while the meaning of it altogether escaped Henry Dilworth himself, in his social ignorance and indifference.

He was a man who had never visited in that world to which Kate belonged. His life had been full of work, and his mind was full of simple ambitions. He was a working man of a class not uncommon in our time, for his ideas and chosen pursuits were on a level with those of highly educated men, and yet he made no effort and had no desire to escape from the sphere to which he naturally belonged. His interest in the objects of his pursuit was intense and simple, not secondary to any desire for fame or longing for social success; he pursued knowledge (the knowledge to which he was attracted) for its own sake, and not as a stepping-stone to personal advantage. Therefore, if he missed many opportunities of gain, he

escaped many chances of slight: his simplicity and single-mindedness made his happiness, and had, so far, insured his success. A mind at ease to follow the higher objects of ambition works more powerfully than a mind fretted by lesser aims and conscious of personal humiliations. He was unencumbered by family ties, physically strong, mentally quiet. It was not, therefore, wonderful that in his battle with the world he had so far had the best of it. He had emigrated early, had undergone a period of hard work and bitter privation in the mere effort to earn a living, but had found himself before he was thirty years old a successful and, comparatively speaking, a free man.

His occupations had afforded him much opportunity for the study of natural history; he had read largely on this subject and on that of travel and geographical discovery. With comparative leisure at his disposal he turned his energies into the direction of exploration of unknown

tracts of country, and observation of the animal kingdom.

There had been one break in the loneliness of his life, when he married a pleasant country girl—a farmer's daughter—whose healthy industry and cheerful temper were her principal attractions. He had not attempted to introduce her to his special pursuits; he had never demanded sympathy with regard to these, nor desired admiration for his achievements. And his wife had considered it a very harmless weakness on his part that he should make journeys up country from time to time to discover the source of a stream, or some other useless phenomenon;—so long as he did not neglect his work and showed himself capable and industrious in the management of it. Also the books which he pored over in the evening, making notes of his own on the margin, attracted but little of her attention or curiosity. She did not know, probably, how expensive they were, and if she had done so would not have

protested against this one feature of extravagance in the conduct of a man so thrifty and self-denying as her husband. Poring over books and making futile journeys were regarded as her husband's harmless hobbies. Sometimes, indeed, the journeys were difficult and dangerous enough, and Henry Dilworth came back from them, gaunt, thin, and worn out. She nursed him back to strength on these occasions, and reproved him a little.

“Isn’t there work enough on the farm, lad, that thou mun knock theeself up for what’s good for nougħt when it’s done?” she would ask him.

But a day or two of rest always put him right again, and he never swerved in this pursuit of the knowledge he loved best.

After three years of married life his wife was taken from him by one of those swift illnesses which make sudden tragedies in commonplace lives. After her death Henry Dilworth formed no new domestic ties. She had given him no children, and the fact

that he had once been married seemed to have disposed of that sort of experience for ever for him, and to have left him more fixedly lonely than if he had been still a bachelor. He grieved over the loss of her who had been a kind and pleasant companion ; but his healthy and active nature —uncultivated in habits of introspection, in the nursing and cherishing of grief by observation, contemplation, and analysis—received no permanent shock from this trouble ; the wound healed, and he became cheerful as before. Perhaps he was a little more helpful to others afterwards, and at the same time a little more unreserved in his devotion to his favourite pursuits, as a man could afford to be who held his life, as it were, in his own hands, and involved no other creature in his failure or success.

He was at this time over forty years of age, and a prosperous man. He had command of more money than he cared to spend on himself, for he had never altered his simple habits, nor indulged in personal

luxuries. He was, therefore, free to dispense money largely in certain directions and on special occasions ; and his social position was somewhat a mystery to his fellow-passengers. He did not travel first-class ; his clothes were rough, though good ; yet he had books in his possession which it would have emptied a poor man's pocket to purchase ; and when a charitable subscription was got up on behalf of the widow of a sailor, killed by a fall from the mast-head, Henry Dilworth gave three times as much as any one else on board.

“ Is he rich, do you think, or is he poor ? I can’t make him out,” said Kate to her husband.

“ Rich, I should say, for a man with his habits,” her husband replied ; “ poor, probably, if he had the good fortune to marry a wife like you.”

“ But why doesn’t he change his habits ? ” said Kate ; “ travel first-class, and get other clothes ? ”

“ I suppose he doesn’t care to.”

“Oh, but every one must care to be comfortable and—and *nice*.”

“Perhaps he cares for other things more,” suggested Jack; “and if he’s to take any more of these journeys I heard him telling you about, it’s as well that he shouldn’t learn to feel more comfortable on a feather-bed than on the hard ground.”

“But why does he take those journeys? I don’t understand; I never heard of him. He doesn’t write or do anything of that sort.”

“He wants to find out for himself, I suppose.”

“For *himself*? What’s the use, if no one hears of it?” protested Kate; for in those days Mr. Smiles had not made it fashionable to admire scientific cobblers and geological bakers, as we have all learnt to do since.

Kate found Mr. Dilworth very pleasant, however, though he was so incomprehensible, not to say impossible. She supposed that there was some explanation of his proceedings, not revealed to her;

that some one paid him for the journeys, for instance. He was so strong, helpful, and pleasant, that he became gradually known as a useful man to every one on board. He was never obtrusive, because he had no object in making acquaintance with any one who did not desire it; but he was a person from whom it was easy and pleasant to obtain assistance. The captain and sailors looked upon him with as much favour as the passengers, as a man very slow to offer help, and very safe to rely upon for it when it was really needed.

He was also very pleasant to talk to, though he knew nothing of conversation as an art. His experiences had been various and interesting; he discoursed upon them freely when encouraged to do so; he found it as natural to give information as to seek it or receive it; but always for the primary reason that information is valuable and interesting, not for the secondary one of enhancing his own importance or flattering that of others.

He looked younger than his forty-two years. The absence of mental worry and the enjoyment of congenial pursuits had preserved his fresh and healthy appearance, in spite of hardships voluntarily or involuntarily undergone in the past. The expression of quiet power, of restful capacity, in his face made it a pleasant one to look at, for any one understanding it; and he had the gentleness of manner which is a natural accompaniment of strength and simplicity. Of consciously acquired polish he had none; his manners were only good in the sense that they were never bad; the natural good taste which frequently accompanies a mind of a high order had freed him, without conscious effort, from any disagreeable habit of his class. The small laws of etiquette which society has found it necessary to impose on itself for its own well-being were not, indeed, within his cognizance, and he would not have done any of the right things in a drawing-room on a festive

occasion. Happily no one had ever seen him in a drawing-room in the past, and he did not seem likely to enter one in the future. He was on his way back to the rough dwelling which stood to him for a home, where he would transact business with a far-seeing and home-keeping "partner," who was glad to carry out the schemes set in motion by Henry Dilworth before ; and then he would once more go "up country" to satisfy his mind about a lost river, which he was determined to find out and understand.

Meanwhile he took the varieties of intercourse on board ship as he took all other experiences, easily, without unnecessary forethought or reflection.

When Kate chose to amuse herself by his conversation, he was ready to be amusing, though he did not always see why she laughed at experiences not in themselves ridiculous. She made a favourable report of his intelligence to her husband.

“Such an interesting man your friend Mr. Dilworth is! Those common—I mean those uncommon—men often are. There was a boatman at Keswick who knew the oddest things—about eagles and—and some other sort of bird—I forgot what.”

Agnes attached even less personality than her sister to this new acquaintance of theirs. He was to her purely a phenomenon of the moment and of the life they were then leading on board ship. He was like the mast, or the sails, or the sailors themselves in their characteristic costumes, whom she knew, indeed, to be men with private existences, but never thought of as such. They were all features of the scene, patches of colour on a moving background. The animate and inanimate objects of this ocean transit held a more confused position in her mind than she was at all aware of.

Possibly if she had shown a more personal interest in their fellow-traveller, Kate

would have felt it her duty to be on less friendly terms with him. She did, indeed, keep a measure of distance which he was not aware of. She never spoke of her own home, of her own people, and he never made reference to his. His private life, his relatives, his companions, were facts which she chose to be ignorant of; it was only his "adventures" which interested her, as she might have been interested in the yarn of a sailor. To Agnes they were little more than fairy tales or stories from "books," which need have no connection with reality. Experiences of hunger and thirst, of solitude in the desert, of hardship, fatigue, and privation, these could never be, she thought, realities to her; they could never be actual factors in her life, any more than the giants of fable. Only one of Henry Dilworth's stories touched her with a sense of reality, and this filled her with shuddering disgust. It was the history of the loss of a favourite dog, and was told in connection with the death of the shark. The noble animal had

saved his master's life at the cost of its own by plunging into the water when he was swimming, on another occasion, to escape a shark; the shark had seized the dog, and the man had reached the land.

"I shall never forget it," he said. "I see it all over again when I look at the water on a calm day; the poor fellow being dragged under, and the look in his eyes as he went down. And I could do nothing—nothing, except make his sacrifice useless by becoming one myself. It is a painful recollection. It is not pleasant to think of having cost so much to any creature that cared for one like that."

"Why did you tell us such a story?" said Agnes with a shiver. "I would rather not have known it."

He looked at her with surprise, for she seldom spoke to him.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "I didn't think of that."

"I have seen a shark, and I can imagine how it was," she went on; "I would

rather not have known it. I might fall overboard myself, or Kate, and then—I think you should not have told us," she said, with decision.

This outbreak of feeling perplexed Henry Dilworth somewhat. Was it selfishness or sympathy? He put it down to sympathy, as the pleasantest solution of the enigma.

Afterwards Agnes spoke of the incident to her brother-in-law.

"I don't think it was nice of your friend to tell us such a horrid tale," she said. "I don't like hearing of dreadful things."

"But you read of them in the papers."

"It's different in *print*. I don't want to hear of them happening to people I talk to. Susie never would allow it."

"Allow the things to happen to the people, do you mean, or you to talk to them afterwards?" he inquired.

"You know what I mean—allow us to know, to be told. She sent away one nurse who had a brother drowned."

“How very inconsiderate of the nurse. Come, Agnes, don’t take it so seriously. We are grown up, after all.”

“I don’t know that Agnes is grown up,” said Kate, pinching her sister’s cheek according to habit, “and I don’t know that I want her to be yet awhile. Why should she?”

“For her own convenience,” suggested the practical Jack.

“Oh, as to that, I’m grown up enough for two, or three, or any number, and you’re a greedy Jack, an ill-regulated, unsatisfactory Jack, if you want there to be more than one of me.”

“There couldn’t,” said Jack, “you’re a unique production. The world would have to start from the beginning and go through everything again to evolve another like you; and what beats everything is, that I should be the lucky fellow it’s all been done for.”

This audacious compliment ended the discussion.

CHAPTER V.

A STORMY PRESENT.

SUNSHINE and pleasant breezes did not last for ever, not even to the end of the voyage. As the ship sailed southwards the weather became cold, and stormy winds arose. Days without sunshine and full of rain followed one another without break. Most of the passengers suffered from sea-sickness ; even the light-hearted Kate had to take to her berth, and there bemoan the change of circumstances. She said frankly she didn't like the bad weather, couldn't endure being ill, and considered that the voyage had lasted long enough. She seemed to expect that Jack should bring it to an abrupt conclusion for her convenience, in some fashion not specified.

Agnes escaped the prevailing malady of sea sickness, but she was very much frightened by the gale.

Bereft of her sister's company, she did not often venture on deck; when she did so, it was to look timidly at the stormy sky and the darkly-tossing waters, over which the ship was driving along in melancholy fashion. Solitude in such a scene filled her with vague alarms; and to be alone with Jack was not altogether pleasant. She felt that she was not clever enough for his society, and that he might "tease" her.

The gaiety of the life on board was over for every one; the pleasant evenings on deck were abolished; the pretty dresses in which Kate had looked so charming and Agnes so lovely, were put away in favour of warmer travelling costumes; and the waterproof cloaks provided by Miss Leslie's carefulness were accepted as the only possible outdoor toilette for her sisters. Among other pleasant things which

the rough weather brought to an abrupt end were the talks on deck with Henry Dilworth.

One afternoon, after a night more stormy than usual, Agnes made her way up into the open air. The noises of the gale had frightened her, the terrible tossing about in the darkness had been full of horror to her: she had feared at every plunge that the ship would sink to rise no more; and now she felt a longing to look at the sky and the water, and the world outside the ship before the sun went down upon it once again.

“Perhaps I shall see land somewhere,” she said to herself, for she did not think of applying geography, any more than other school lessons, to real life; “we must surely be getting near *some* country.”

She fancied that Jack was on deck, and that he would join her as soon as she appeared there; but the only thing that met her at the top of the steps was a wild gust of wind, which wrenched her

hat from her head, and sent it careering over the sea.

She looked around for help, but Jack was not there; the one person close at hand was Henry Dilworth. He seemed to have the run of the vessel now, having made himself too generally useful to be considered in the way anywhere. He came forward, and put out his hand to help Agnes.

“It is rough weather for you up here,” he said, “and I’m afraid you won’t see your hat again.”

“That does not matter,” she answered, clinging to the rail, and looking around her in bewilderment. “I ought not to have put it on. Oh, how windy it is! I thought my brother-in-law was here. My sister was not well enough to come up with me, and I wanted some fresh air. But perhaps I had better go down again. It doesn’t seem safe.”

“Oh, it’s safe enough. Give me your hand, and I’ll put you where you won’t

feel the wind so much. That's better, isn't it? It would be a pity to go down again."

" You are very kind. Yes, it's better here. But oh! how rough the water is!" She turned her sweet face to him as she spoke, and looked like a flower beaten and driven by the storm.

She had drawn the hood of her water-proof over her head, and her eyes looked out like a bit of lost summer sky from under the dark folds. Her sweet little mouth drooped wofully at the corners, and the soft outlines of her cheeks, the childlike dimple of her chin, were brought into full relief by her sombre dress and the wild scene around her.

" Is it very dangerous, do you think ? " she asked, looking at him wistfully.

" Not at all," he answered cheerfully, " as things are now. Ships are at sea in all sorts of weather and come home safely."

" I suppose they do," she answered with

a sigh, "but not *all* of them. You have been a great deal to sea, have you not? Were you ever in a wreck?"

"Three times."

"Oh!" she answered, in a little tone of horror; "was anybody drowned?"

"Not the first time."

"And the second?"

"Only one man."

"Then people are not *always* drowned when there is a shipwreck? But here I think we should all be. There is no land anywhere."

"There are the boats."

"Oh, the boats! On this dreadful water! Can you swim?"

"Yes."

"That must make you feel safer; but even that would be no use; there is nowhere to swim to here."

"Why should you think of such things?"

"I can't help it. In the night when I am alone, and hear the water, and the dreadful noise as if the ship must come

to pieces, I cannot sleep. I am not used to being alone: there was always Kate until she got married. Last night she was good and came to me; I was so dreadfully frightened. I couldn't help crying. That's so foolish, isn't it?" she appealed to him. "Susie would not like it."

"I can't tell, I'm sure," answered Henry Dilworth; "if you can't help it, I suppose it can't be helped."

"It is almost as bad every night," Agnes went on, "and Kate cannot always come. In the daytime she even laughs at me for being afraid; so does Jack. It is dreadful to be afraid; you do not know how dreadful!" she added in a low tone.

"Poor child!" he said sympathetically, forgetting that she was not a child after all.

"You are never afraid, I suppose?" she asked with wistful wonder.

"Not in that way. It makes me more sorry for you. I wish I could help you."

"I suppose that no one can," she answered with another sigh. "I look at

that water, that dreadful water, and I think what it must be to drown. I seem to feel the waves taking hold of me; and then I wish that I had never come away. I am not brave, like Kate."

She ended with a ring of distress in her voice, and Henry Dilworth looked at her and tried to understand her trouble; for he was touched by her childish confidence and appeal to him.

"I don't like to think that you mind it so much," he answered. "Have you nothing you believe in that will make you not care, so that you could leave it all to happen as it should do and must, without being afraid beforehand?"

She looked at him wonderingly.

"I don't know. I suppose you mean—religion. I ought to have that. Susie always took care that we were taught properly. And she said we could be good without going to church so very much. I mean on week-days. Of course we always went on Sundays. But those

things seem so far away—not real. We have to think of them, and we *see* these. This water is so near: even if I shut my eyes I hear it. And the wind feels so strong and is so loud and rough. Have you anything to think of that helps you?"

"I don't need help so much in that way. I have to be up and doing when things go wrong, as a rule, and there is a satisfaction in that. When there is nothing to be done I don't feel the use of being anxious. I like to watch and see how it's managed by the power that's got hold of it and won't let me touch it. There's a pleasure sometimes in feeling so small and seeing how big other things are. But then I have no one to be afraid for except myself—and what's the life of a man, after all, in a world like this?" he said, putting out his hand to indicate the tossing sea and the stormy sky which made all the visible universe.

"You are so strong every way," Agnes answered, looking at him with wonder,

envy, and perhaps admiration. "I am not like that. I never can do anything when things go wrong. People have always taken care of me, and that makes me wonder if they can go on doing it, if they will be able, or if they will remember, when any real danger comes."

"You will feel so—naturally," he replied thoughtfully ; "it isn't pleasant to have to rely on others ; and then in real danger, as you say, what can others do ? You ought to have something to believe in better than just the help of your friends. A man feels the need of that sometimes, and what must a woman do ? Did you ever hear of Sir Humphrey Gilbert ?"

"I don't think so," said Agnes, doubtfully.

"I was only thinking of something he said to encourage his men in danger : 'We are as near heaven by sea as by land.' Now if you could feel something like that," Henry Dilworth suggested doubtfully. But the doubt was in his own power of express-

ing the idea correctly, and not in the efficacy of the idea itself. His theological views were by no means orthodox, nor perhaps reasonable. It never entered into his head for a moment to think that Agnes might not be "fit for" heaven, that possibly the gates might be closed against her. A suggestion that he himself had a better chance of getting there would have been dismissed by him as out of the question. Her helplessness seemed to him a sufficient reason for an open door into the better land. He looked upon heaven as a haven for the weak rather than a reward for the righteous. He did not go so far as to make it into that mere refuge for the destitute and paradise for the incapable into which it is transformed in the minds of some persons; but he felt, without reasoning about it, that as all women, children, and helpless persons are put into the safest and most comfortable places in this world by the men who belong to them, naturally in the world to come they would have the

preference also. If he had been told that after death he might be required to wait at the eternal gates, to see if room would be left for him after all the women and children had gone in, his sense of justice would hardly have revolted. For the heaven he had heard of was surely a place fitter for the residence of sweet women and innocent children than of such strong men as himself. It would be quite according to the fixed order of things that something should be found for him to do outside, as it always had been found for him in this world, while others took the comfortable places and seemed at home there. In the few sermons to which he had listened no mention had been made of that heaven conceived by Mrs. Browning as being but a higher work to a surer issue; and his imagination had never busied itself in working out theological details for himself. He accepted, therefore, the theories generally propounded on the subject without much analyzing, and was content, on his own

behalf, to wait for orders in death as in life. The next thing that evidently wanted doing constituted the order which he considered himself to have received. When there was nothing to be done he could be happy in idleness; and when things got beyond any doing of his, he had a way of standing in silence, mentally cap in hand, as if he watched the actions of a superior being whose ultimate designs were not confided to him. There was, therefore, nothing cynical in his belief that heaven was ready for Agnes at any moment when earth rejected her, and whatever life of frivolity she might have led hitherto.

His effort to comfort her succeeded beyond his hopes.

“I remember that,” she said, her face brightening, “it is Longfellow; only I had forgotten the man’s name.

He sat upon the deck,
The book was in his hand;
‘Do not fear! Heaven is as near,’
He said, ‘by water as by land!’”

And she smiled with pleasure at this proof of her own knowledge of literature. "I shall try to think of it now when I am frightened. Do *you* feel like that—like Sir Humphrey Gilbert?"

"I haven't often felt afraid at sea. Things happen quickly there, and there is not so much time for thinking. Besides, there are many people about as a rule, and there's something to be done for them, or for yourself."

"And when *have* you felt afraid?" Agnes asked with interest.

"Well, I don't think it's ever been just like what you seem to feel. It hasn't been downright unpleasant, only strange. I felt it the most when I've been alone in some desert place, and perhaps walked till I thought I could walk no farther, but must lie down and die.

"Oh, how dreadful!" breathed Agnes, as if for the first time realizing that his sufferings had been personal, and not part of an imaginative story.

“Other men have been in the same sort of thing, and had to go through with it, too, as I never had,” he answered. “But when you’re alone like that, and quite alone, altogether beyond helping yourself; when you know you must stay where you lie down, and no one care to bury you; when there’s not a creature near to bring you a morsel of food or a cup of water, and no one will, perhaps, ever know how you came to die, or where; that makes you begin to think, not exactly of heaven, but of God. The world’s empty, you look up thinking, perhaps, He sees; and you can give up your commission into His hand, as it might be. I’ve felt something like that at times.”

“Ah, you are so different!” said Agnes, in a low awestruck voice. “I like to think of heaven, but I am afraid of God.”

“But heaven is, I suppose, only a little bit of God,” suggested Henry Dilworth.

“I am afraid of the rest. I mean—I mean,” she said, hesitating and flushing,

“ I don’t want to say anything wrong. But it seems so strong, doesn’t it, and so cruel —the rest of it, all except heaven? They say even that Death is an angel. But how dreadful to have angels like that! Even Longfellow is dreadful sometimes, though he tries to make things sound pleasant. Do you know the next verse?—

‘ In the first watch of the night,
Without a signal’s sound,
Out of the sea mysteriously,
The fleet of Death rose all around.’”

She looked round her at the dark water as she spoke, and shivered with apprehension.

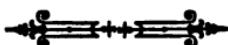
“ That’s only a poetical way of putting it,” said her companion.

“ Yes. It’s pretty to read on shore, but not here, at sea. No, I don’t like to think of death or of God. But I will think about heaven as much as ever I can. Thank you for helping me. The others are not so kind—about this, I mean. They don’t understand.”

For the first time she put out her hand to shake his, as 'she said good-bye, and some instinct of reverential compassion made him raise his hat.

"I shall say that verse over and over to myself when I am feeling frightened," she said.

And she went away comforted by her little formula against terror, as is the nun when she tells her beads, or the savage when he propitiates his hideous little idol. Her primitive longing for personal safety was wrapped about by mystic idealism, and she was as profoundly ignorant as the rest of her kind of the narrow selfishness of her little bit of religion.



CHAPTER VI.

A BREAK IN THE CLOUDS.

THE next night and the next night again the storm raged with increased violence. On the second of these two nights no one on the vessel slept, but on the afternoon of the day following there was a lull in the wind and a break in the clouds, through which the sun appeared shining dimly on a watery world, as if to see what ruin had been wrought in its absence.

Such of the passengers as were able to leave their berths went on deck, that they might make the most of the little brightness, and cheer themselves with the prospect of finer weather.

Kate was among these ; her pretty colour had fled with her charming vivacity, and an expression of impatient disgust was on her features.

“What a passage!” she said, shrugging her shoulders as she looked at the wave-masses rising and falling under the chilly light. “Did any one ever have a worse?”

“It hasn’t lasted all the time, you know,” Jack said, apologetically. “We had some good weather at the beginning.”

“I’ve almost forgotten, it’s so long since,” she retorted, with a touch of her usual sauciness. “Oh, Mr. Dilworth, haven’t we had a dreadful time?”

“Rather bad for ladies,” Henry Dilworth replied. “I’m glad to see you better, however.”

“I’m obliged to be better, in spite of the weather, for it won’t give me any help towards it. Last night I think I was frightened out of my sickness. I never closed my eyes a minute; I suppose nobody did. You may imagine what my sister felt.”

“I wasn’t so *very* much afraid,” Agnes said softly. Then, when Mr. Dilworth came and stood next to her, she continued

in the same low tone, "I said that verse over many times when the ship was tossing so. I think it helped me a little."

"What *is* the child talking about?" Kate asked with a little stare of astonishment.

"A verse in Longfellow," Agnes answered, "that Mr. Dilworth reminded me of."

"Oh, Longfellow," Kate replied, opening her eyes wider still. "I shouldn't have supposed Mr. Dilworth would read Longfellow."

There was something of the fine lady's polite insolence in her way of saying it, but this passed unperceived by her sister and Mr. Dilworth. It was replied to by her husband.

"Nor I," he said drily; "it's more a schoolgirl's style of poetry."

"What do you mean by that?" she asked, softening at once, as she always did, when her husband came into any discussion;

and thereupon the two fell into conversation together, leaving Agnes and Mr. Dilworth to talk undisturbed.

“I’m glad the storm’s over,” Agnes said. “It is so terrible when it lasts so long! It is over, isn’t it?” she asked appealingly.

“The wind has certainly fallen to-day,” he answered cheerfully.

“And it’s pleasant to see a little land, although it is land of such a miserable sort,” she continued, her eyes turning to some desolate rocks which they were approaching.

“I don’t know about that,” Harry Dilworth said; “we’ve given up the custom of hugging the shore. Next to a good harbour the open sea’s best in a storm.”

“But if you are wrecked?”

“You are not so likely to be wrecked.”

“But if you *are*?”

“Well, if you are, of course it’s good to have some solid ground to get on.”

“That’s what I think. So that I like to look at those ugly islands. Aren’t they ugly

And the sea-birds swarm over them so. I suppose nothing else lives there? It would be too dreadful. It makes me think of my own home to see land again. It is so beautiful at home where I live. There are such woods and rivers! The hill rises up behind the house. The road runs in front, and then there's the river with the stepping-stones across."

"What *are* you telling Mr. Dilworth?" Kate interrupted, in renewed surprise, and with evident disapprobation. She was not aware of the interview which had established a confidential feeling of friendship between the two; and she did not like to hear her sister discoursing of her own home to this Australian. It was "too intimate."

"As if he cares to hear about our little village!" she said.

Agnes blushed vividly at the reproof; but she made a little effort to defend herself.

"Perhaps it was foolish. But then I'm not clever. I can't talk like you, Kate, about things I never saw."

“Who wants you to be clever? That’s quite another thing. Come away with me now. I came up for a little cheerfulness after being in the horrid cabin so long; but I’m sure the sea looks horrid, and that land looks horrid, and the sun only shines enough to show distinctly how horrid everything is. How you *can* talk of Longfellow in such a scene passes my comprehension!”

Agnes followed her sister meekly. She thought that Kate was “cross” through being ill, a phenomenon not without precedent in her experience. When the two girls had disappeared, Jack and Henry Dilworth remained looking silently at the rugged islets towards which they were driving. These were mostly mere jagged bits of rock, fretting the waters which broke stormily around them. They were treeless and desolate, the haunt of countless sea-birds, which disturbed the air by their cries.

One rock alone, which the ship passed

last of all, and some time after the ladies had gone below, was large enough to be called an island. It rose like a table from the water, with steep cliff sides, and level dreary top. Only in one place there seemed to be a tiny beach of jagged rock and broken stone, where a footing could be secured above the water's surface and below the face of the cliff.

"I don't remember seeing these islands as we went," Jack remarked.

"We've no business to be seeing them now; but we've been driven out of our course, and are a good deal farther south than we ought to be. They are the Cross Islands."

"Not promising places for a settlement."

"No. A man might scrape enough together there to keep himself alive if need were, I suppose, but not much more."

"I'd rather not be the one to try the experiment," said Jack; and then he went below to his wife, for it was already getting dusk.

Another passenger strolled up to Henry Dilworth and remarked, "We've got the worst over at last."

"H'm!" was the answer, grimly enough given; "I can't say, I'm sure. We've got some dirty weather before us yet. I shouldn't care to have any women belonging to me on board."

This was a new sort of reflection for the solitary, independent man to make; but the passenger was only interested in its direct application.

"Why do you say so? The wind's fallen, and the ship's right and tight, in spite of all she's come through. You're not used to the sea, perhaps."

"The land is more in my way, certainly; but I've seen a thing or two on 'the great deep' in my time. Any man must, who goes backwards and forwards about the world much. What I'm thinking is that the clouds over there are getting into a knot, just where the wind comes from, and they'll have to loose themselves somehow."

When they begin, I expect that we're in for it worse than we had it before. And I don't much like the way the ship takes the water in bad weather. She's a new ship, but that's not always the best thing. A ship in good condition that's been tried is what I like. Once or twice last night I thought she was going to behave in an ugly fashion. A ship in such a storm as that should be like a living thing with a hand she knows guiding her. However, we've got a good captain, and that's in our favour."

Nearly all the passengers went to bed early that evening, tired out by the sleepless hours of the night before. Before long the wind rose again, and the storm renewed itself with increased violence. Most of them slept through the noise of it, partly out of sheer exhaustion, partly because they were getting used to the situation and beginning, by force of habit, to fear it less.

Henry Dilworth remained on deck. The appeal of Agnes had touched him deeply, as a new and strange experience; and the

soft outlines of her sweet face haunted him now in the darkness. It was a face made for sunshine and caresses ; it was out of place in the wildness of the storm. The fitting thing to do would have been to lift its owner out of the tossing ship, and put her down safely in some warm and cosy corner of the world. But miles and miles of stormy sea were heaving their hungry waters between her and a haven of safety ; she must take her chance with the rest and go through the dangers and discomforts for which she seemed so little fit.

In the darkness some hours afterwards Henry Dilworth found his way to the saloon, where Jack had fallen asleep with a book in his hand.

“ I’m glad you’ve not gone to bed,” he remarked.

“ I was just thinking of it,” Jack said, waking and yawning ; “ every one else has gone long since, and is fast asleep by this time. How the ship tosses ! It’s worse than last night.”

“Mrs. Langford has gone to bed, and her sister?”

“At nine o’clock. They were altogether done up, poor things!”

“Don’t disturb them, then. It’s no use frightening them before it is necessary ; let them sleep while they can. But I’d come on deck myself if I were you.”

“Anything wrong ?” asked Jack, wide awake on the instant.

“I’m afraid there is ; a good deal. We’re pretty well damaged by this gale already, and if it lasts I don’t see how the ship can stand it. It’s about as much as they can manage now to keep her head right and let her go where the wind takes her ; and this isn’t altogether a part of the sea where I’d choose to let the wind have the driving of us. There are rocks on both sides of our course, I fancy, for a good distance now.”

“I’ll come on deck,” Jack answered laconically.

On deck, in the darkness, the scene—what there was of it—was desolate. There

was a good deal to be heard and felt, however. The ship plunged and struggled in the rough waters like a creature frantic with an effort beyond its strength ; and the wind-beaten ocean showed no signs of weakness ; it sent wave after wave to the battle, each as strong as the last.

“It looks a bad business if the wind doesn’t drop,” Jack remarked to Henry Dilworth, as they stood in the most sheltered place they could find.

“A very bad business.”

Jack lit his cigar—a matter of difficulty under the circumstances—like a man prepared to make the best of things so long as he had the chance of it.

“Poor Kate!” he said : “if this sort of thing had to be, it’s a pity it wasn’t on my way to England instead of now.”

“Yes,” answered Henry Dilworth with earnestness ; “it’s not the same thing when you’ve women belonging to you to think of. I never had—at such a time as this. If things come to the worst, and you have

to see to your wife, I'll look after her sister."

"You're very good. I hope there'll be no occasion, however."

"I hope there won't," was the answer, and nothing more was said of the matter. But Henry Dilworth had given his word, and when occasion came he fulfilled it to the uttermost.



CHAPTER VII.

DARKNESS AND DEATH.

AGNES had fallen asleep, utterly worn out by emotion and wakefulness. The rising of the storm only rocked her at first, it seemed, to deeper slumber; then it crept into her dreams and wove strange unrealities there. The roaring of the waves, the groans of the ship struggling against an enemy too strong for it, the loud voices shouting above the storm, and the ominous crashing of timber, took fantastic forms of trouble in her dreams.

She was struggling to cross the stepping-stones to her own home, and always when she got a couple of yards in any direction the water flowed over the next stone and forced her to turn back. She could not land on either side, for her approach was

the signal of the rising of the water, which subsided behind her and surged in front of her. Over the flooded stepping-stones great tree trunks were carried, and the rain poured ; behind her were sunshine and dry stones ; but as often as she fled from one to the other the circumstances were reversed, and she found herself plunging into the flood and the storm. She could hear the rain and the wind rush into the trees on each bank as she tried to reach it. Her sister Susie, who stood on the road by the house, was enveloped in the tempest when they tried to meet, but between them the river flowed gently whenever they moved apart.

At last she saw Henry Dilworth approaching on the other side, and he put out his hand to help her ; then she heard the crack of an ash tree on the brink, torn up at its roots by the rush of the current which swept over the whole face of the river, engulfing bank and road ; and felt herself borne away—somewhere—with a

hand she could not grasp snatching at hers.

She woke with a confused sense of unusual noise or silence, she did not know which ; a shock, or the absence of a shock, had roused her suddenly. There was a creaking of boards and a shivering of the ship, as if it too stood arrested in an un comprehended nightmare fear ; and there was a great noise of rushing water, the loud cries of voices, but, beyond these things, something strange in the position of affairs, something new in her sensations, which she could not at once define.

She could feel the shock of a great wave striking the ship, which seemed to quiver and shrink, like a wounded creature trembling under a blow it can no longer escape and has no strength to resist ; but in spite of this, there was an incongruous impossible feeling of stillness ; and then she began to realize that the ship was not tossing any more.

She had no time to consider what this

meant, or for any further thought at all, for there was a sharp knocking at her door, and the voice of Jack saying, "Agnes, are you awake?"

"Yes," she answered, starting up.

"Don't be frightened, but get dressed at once, as fast as you can, in your warmest clothes. Never mind collars and such things. There's something wrong and we must go on deck. I'll come for you in five minutes."

Something wrong! Her first feeling was that she had lived all her life aware of this hour, which was dark with a horror beyond her nature to endure; her first instinct was to throw herself on the pillow and sob in passionate despair. She could not meet the elements raging against her life; let them take her as she was, without calling upon her for any effort first. But the habit of obedience was strong within her; she roused herself, and with trembling fingers put on the warm travelling costume which she had been wearing of late. She was obedient, even

about the collar, and hastily knotted a woollen scarf round her neck instead; she was in that confusion of mind which makes it impossible to realize whether the time occupied in doing a necessary thing is long or short, and she seemed to be struggling through a thousand moments, in each of which the desire confronted her of sinking on the floor in a stupor of horror; but the instinct of escape and the habit of obedience were stronger, and she put all her clothes on, even to the waterproof. She was drawing the hood of it over her head when Jack's voice was heard again, saying :

“Are you ready? I’m taking Kate up and then I’ll come for you.”

“I’m ready now,” she answered, and plunged at the door to open it; but Jack was already gone. When she knew that she was left in solitude for a little longer, a horrid fear came over her; she fancied that the ship would go down at once, and that she would be swallowed up in

the darkness alone. To drown in the open water seemed at that minute a privilege. She could not bear to wait; and so she struggled up by herself. When her head was on a level with the deck she noticed for the first time how much the vessel slanted; the boards looked, to her excited imagination, like a steep hill: some persons, dark objects in the darkness, appeared to be stumbling across the slope just below her. At that moment, while she hesitated, there was a great rush of water over the lower half of the vessel; it engulfed the figures, and poured down upon her, catching her breath and forcing her to cling to the rail her hand was upon. Some one caught her at the moment, and she heard the voice of Henry Dilworth.

“Is that you, Miss Leake? You should have waited. I was coming for you.”

“I dared not wait. I was afraid. What is the matter? Where are we?”

“We’ve run on a rock, but I hope we shall get away all right. The boats are

being prepared. Come with me ; I'll take you to your sister. But you must do as you're told."

The rush of water was for the moment gone. The slope of deck was clear, apparently there was no one on it.

"I—I thought some people were there," Agnes said wonderingly.

"Did you? Never mind. Come on."

He spoke with authority, and lifting her actually in his arms, ran with her to a higher place, where Jack stood with Kate clinging to him.

"I'm off to help with the boats," Henry Dilworth said to Jack Langford, as he placed her in the securest corner. "Stay where you are, and you're right. The ship won't break to pieces for a good half-hour yet, the captain believes ; and she won't go down before she breaks. She's too well spiked for that."

"You'll tell us when to come?"

"Yes ; only keep here with the ladies. And, whatever you do, don't be tempted to

get into the first boat ; it's almost certain to be overloaded. I'll come when it's time for you to take your places."

"If we've struck a rock, can't we be landed on it?" Kate asked, speaking for the first time. Her face was white, her features set—all the youthful vivacity gone from them ; but she held her head erect, as if defiant of terror, and she clung to Jack (with whom at least it was something to die) as if she had forgotten Agnes. Jack put his arm round his sister-in-law, but he did not speak to her ; and he looked every moment from the dark scene about him into his wife's white face.

"There's nothing to land on that the sea is not breaking over."

"Can any boat live in this water?" Kate asked again.

"Yes, when it's clear of these breakers. The storm is subsiding ; it has been doing so for the last half-hour ; but the ship was injured before, and didn't answer to the helm."

There was silence after that. Kate lifted

her face once for her husband to kiss, and he said, “Poor child!” with indescribable compassion and compunction; but the brightness of her eye lighted up her features with a look not altogether pitiable. Neither of the two addressed Agnes, and she did not attempt to speak; her stupor of wonder and horror was too great.

The violence of the tempest was certainly subsiding; the water no longer beat with such continued fury against the wreck, but at intervals a great wave struck it and washed all its lower portion, as it had done when Agnes watched the mysterious disappearance of those figures on the deck. Many of the passengers were already beyond the need of boats; how and when they had gone in the darkness and confusion, out of the way of all help, the great waves only knew. Others were waiting on deck, half dressed, wet through, and shivering with cold and fright. They had hurried up at the first alarm and dared not go down again for warmer clothing. When

the first boat was ready, all those poor creatures were eager to get into it, and it was soon filled. There was plenty of time for the preparation of the next boat, and it was not considered desirable to fill this one only with its crew and helpless women ; some of the men belonging to these women had, therefore, been encouraged to go with them, while a few of the women themselves were advised to wait for the next boat. But when the last moment came and the boat was considered full, several of those who had been afraid to enter it, and who had elected to remain for the next, were terrified at the idea of remaining on the ship even for a few minutes longer. They passionately demanded that room should be found for them. One young couple, with whom the Langfords had been rather intimate, encouraged by the example of Jack and Kate, had at first resolved to wait for the second boat. But the wife's courage failed her at the last moment ; she begged to be taken at any risk, and her husband,

with their baby in his arms, hurried her away, throwing back a word of farewell to the Langfords as he went.

Then the panic spread to another of the little group. A woman with four children had been brought to it by Henry Dilworth. She was going out to join her husband in Australia, and Henry Dilworth had shown her a good deal of kindness on the voyage ; he had told her now to wait until he came to take her away ; but her confidence in his judgment could not resist the force of the general example. She also hastened away with her children, and begged for a place in the first boat. Room was made for herself and the youngest child, then two others were given to her, in answer to her entreaties, but the eldest was not allowed to join her.

“ It’s no use ; there are too many already. He’ll be safer in the next boat,” was the answer.

She stood up, in spite of all remonstrances, gesticulating wildly, while the boy sobbed forlornly on the deck.

But her anguish and anxiety were soon over. The boat was struck by wave after wave as it cleared the ship, and it did not rise buoyantly on the water. The woman cowered down, frightened, among her children ; the young couple clasped hands, and looked into each other's faces for the last time ; then there was a great cry, a tumult and confusion in the darkness, and the agony was over.

Henry Dilworth had brought back the boy to the little group still waiting, consisting now only of the Langfords and Agnes. The child was still sobbing, and asking for his mother.

“Will you take care of him, Miss Leake?” Henry Dilworth said. “He is very much frightened.”

Agnes looked at the boy, and put out her spare hand to him ; that was all she was capable of doing.

“Where is his mother?” asked Jack, who had been too far off to discern, in the darkness, what happened.

“She went in the first boat,” Henry Dilworth answered briefly.

“And what has become of it?” Jack asked hastily. “It should have a light; I don’t see it anywhere; and the people cried out. Jones and his wife were on it. I hope nothing has gone wrong.”

“What’s the use of asking?” Henry Dilworth answered, as he hurried away.

“I suppose he will come back for us?” Kate said in a subdued voice.

“Yes, I suppose so.”

“At any rate, we have had a quarter of an hour longer through taking his advice. It’s a long wedding journey we are likely to take together, isn’t it, Jack?”

“I don’t know, darling. There’s no reason why we shouldn’t get away safely.”

“The other boat has gone down, though he would not tell us so; *and ours will*. Poor Mrs. Jones has got her experience over; ours is to come. Well, I don’t regret *anything*; do you?”

As she looked at him, her eyes were

shining with excitement ; they were courageous and defiant eyes, that demanded the answer she asked for.

“ My dear love ! nothing but that I should have brought you into this danger.”

“ But if *I* don’t regret it, why should you ? If I were not here, it would mean that I had never loved you, that I had not been married to you. It seems to me now, though I never thought so before, that I hadn’t it in me to be a very good wife. But now it doesn’t matter ; you’ll never know it, never believe it. It has been perfect so far. Say you regret nothing.”

“ I regret nothing, darling, if you are satisfied.”

Kate kissed him again, with a strange little laugh ; then her eye caught the shrinking figure of her sister.

“ Poor Agnes ! ” she said ; “ with her it is all for nothing.”

A moment afterwards Henry Dilworth appeared, and spoke to Jack rapidly.

“ Will you take your wife ? and I’ll bring

her sister. I'll come back for the boy after."

Kate and Jack moved away at once. Jack's arm was round his wife, and she clung to him, looking all the while into his face, and not into the darkness through which he guided her.

Henry Dilworth stopped to speak an encouraging word to the boy, telling him to remain where he was ; then he began to follow the two, leading Agnes carefully, for she was perfectly passive. Suddenly he caught her back, clasping her firmly with one strong arm, while he grasped at the nearest support with the other.

Another great wave—one of the last in the subsiding storm—had struck the ship, and was washing over it. Henry Dilworth's movement was quick enough to save himself and Agnes ; the sudden dash of water caught her breath, and made her cling to him with tearless, panting sobs ; but that was all.

In front of them the swirling mass, every

drop of which seemed full of life and power, seethed round the figures of Kate and Jack ; they wavered, flung themselves together with a passionate clasp, and went down into the sucking water.

Henry Dilworth put his hand to his eyes, and tried to peer into the darkness. But the thing was over. There had been no sound, except the thunderous advent and the hollow retreat of the water ; and now there was nothing to see. The wave that had done its errand could keep its secret ; the tossing surface of the sea gave sign of no life except its own.

“Come now ; we’ve no time to lose,” Henry Dilworth said abruptly.

But Agnes seemed too bewildered to move ; she was looking round her with a scared face.

“No, no ; let us stay here. Tell them to come back,” she said, resisting his effort to draw her away.

For answer he lifted her into his arms, carried her to the vessel’s side, and put

her in the boat, almost as if she were an inanimate creature.

“Sit down, and keep still; I will come to you again,” was all he said to her.

She looked round with terrified eagerness. There was no Kate, no Jack, no face that she knew, only men with rugged looks, only the darkness, the water, the doomed ship. The position was horrible, incomprehensible. She covered her face with her hands, and dropped on her knee. Presently the boy was put beside her.

“Let him be with the lady,” she heard Henry Dilworth say. She was too frightened to understand altogether what it meant.

The captain was left on the ship to attempt his escape in the last boat, with what men remained to him. His officers had gone in the first rush of water when the vessel struck, or afterwards: who remembered? who could tell? Some of the passengers had lost their lives in the same way; some had gone down with the first

boat; only the boy was left, and Agnes. She was *the* lady still alive among all those who had been on board the day before; and she was in an open boat on a stormy sea, far away from inhabited land, with a child, a dozen sailors, and Henry Dilworth.



PART II.

LOVE UNREQUITED AND STRENGTH THAT AVAILED NOT.

CHAPTER I.

DRAWING NEARER.

WHEN day dawned a boat was tossing on the rough water near a desolate island, the largest of those rocks which the vessel had passed the evening before. Landing there was difficult, and it was necessary to wait some hours until the great breakers should have lessened with the lessening of the storm.

Agnes had passed a miserable night, shivering with cold and terror. Her clothing was all wet through, and the rug which Henry Dilworth had thrown over her failed to keep her warm. The

boy had fallen asleep beside her, but she was hardly conscious of his presence. With every plunge of the boat she expected to go down into the water and rise no more.

It was long before she dared to look around her, and then it was only to see the sullen waters heaving under a sullen sky. No ship was to be seen, nor any other boat, only the barren rocks and the desolate water. Grief and horror rendered her speechless; she silently rejected the food which Henry Dilworth offered her, and gazed with a fascinated dread on the dreary shore they were drawing near. It could not be that she was to be landed here with all these men—alone? And Kate—where was Kate? She dared not ask, and only looked mutely from time to time into Henry Dilworth's face, trying to see there some sign of hope.

The landing on the island proved very difficult; the men all got their half-dried clothing once more wet through in the

rush through the surf. Henry Dilworth, however, found a place where Agnes and the child could be hauled from the boat to a rock above and so landed on shore dry-shod. This was the first service he was able to render them.

Afterwards all hands were busied in collecting seaweeds and bits of wreck for a fire, in cooking such food as they had, and then in seeking out some shelter for the night.

The emergency failed, however, to arouse Agnes to energy or to action. She sat in her rain cloak, looking anxiously out to sea, and could hardly be persuaded to touch any food.

When night came and she realized in what a miserable spot she must spend it, she broke out into passionate protest.

“Is there nothing better? Can you find me nothing better? I cannot sleep there.”

She spoke almost reproachfully, and Henry Dilworth looked at her with troubled

eyes, grieved that he could not comply with her demands, even when they were unreasonable.

"We will make it better for you to-morrow. At least it is *safe*; nothing can happen to you there."

"How do I know?" she asked with a shudder. "There may be wild beasts."

"There are none. And if there were they should not touch you. I shall sleep a few yards away. If you call out I shall hear you."

"Why doesn't the other boat come, with Kate and Jack? I never knew why you brought me away without them."

"Miss Leake," he said gently, "whatever I have done or tried to do has been for your own safety. I promised Mr. Langford to take care of you."

"But where is he, and where is Kate? I have not dared to ask you all day. You do not mean to tell me they are *drowned*?"

His eyes were full of compassion, and his voice of sympathy.

“Do you not know? Is there any need for me to tell you?”

She was silent for a moment; then she spoke almost angrily, “I will not believe it. Perhaps they will come yet,” and so she turned and left him as if he had been to blame for all.

The next morning brought a new horror; for two bodies were washed ashore. They were those of sailors who had been left on the vessel; and their drifting to the island proved that the third boat must have made good its departure from the ship. It had probably been upset not far from the refuge it was seeking.

This incident added another terror to those already haunting the mind of Agnes. Death was a dreadful thing to her, she had never been face to face with its manifestation before; and now the horror of it spoilt even the thought of her sister Kate, and filled her with a dread stronger than the hope of reunion.

“I would rather never see her again than see her like *that*,” she said to Henry Dilworth. “Kate! who was so pretty and bright and clever! I couldn’t bear it; it would kill me to look at her. Do you think she will come here?”

“It isn’t possible,” he answered; “she was washed off the vessel, and that is too far away.”

“Did you see her? Did you know, *then*? ”

He glanced at her for a moment only, as if the mere recognition of her intense trouble would serve to increase it.

“It’s a pity even to talk of it,” he said.

“That means—that you did. And so did I; but I wouldn’t believe it. It was too dreadful. Now I would rather know. It is better than to think that it happened near here, and that perhaps—some day —she will come.”

It seemed useless to combat these morbid fears; they were only dulled gradually by an increasing consciousness of physical

suffering and discomfort as the days went by and the situation did not change.

Agnes did not make any effort to face the position bravely; she became more and more absorbed in her own miserable sensations, more intense in her desire to escape and to forget all that had happened to her, to be comfortable once again and at rest. She had little sympathy to give to others, and no help; it was some time before she even showed any grateful feeling to Henry Dilworth.

They had been on the island for several days when a new misfortune happened to them. Some of the sailors had more than once suggested taking to the open sea in their boat, and trusting to the chance of meeting a passing ship. But Henry Dilworth had considered such a chance almost desperate at that time of the year; and the rough weather which continued for more than a week after their landing would have rendered such an attempt to escape very dangerous. He

knew the misery of famine, thirst, and sickness in an open boat on a stormy sea ; he believed that the inevitable exposure would kill Agnes and the child, even if the rest escaped. On the island they could at least live ; there was water, and there was the flesh of the sea-birds. Some vessel must at last pass and take them off ; the chance of meeting one on the open sea was hardly greater, and the chance of life was very much less.

The men yielded to his arguments and agreed at least to delay, in hope of better weather ; but when a storm tore the boat from its fastenings in the darkness of the night, and they found themselves in the morning absolute prisoners on the island, with no longer a choice of departure, they could not forgive Henry Dilworth for the advice he had given to them. This was the cause of the first and only quarrel which he had with the men.

When Agnes came out of her hut that day she found the sailors standing together

in a group looking out to sea with gloomy faces. Henry Dilworth was at work near, but the rest seemed to have withdrawn themselves from him, and more than one angry glance was cast in his direction.

“Serves us right for taking a landsman’s word,” one man said angrily.

“It’s as like as not he did it himself,” another muttered with a scowl.

“If I thought that!” said the first, and he finished his sentence with an oath.

Agnes looked from one to another with perplexity, her eyes dilating, and her breath coming quickly.

“What is it?” she said in a low voice to Henry Dilworth.

He looked up from his work and smiled reassuringly.

“An unlucky thing’s happened. The boat has been washed away in the night.”

“But are they angry with you?”

“Yes, at this minute. They are ready

to be angry with any one. They are vexed because I advised them not to go off in the boat before."

"But it wouldn't have been safe to go, would it?"

"They agreed that it wouldn't at the time; but men in their situation can't always be reasonable; 'tisn't likely," he said drily.

He waited, therefore, for a return to a more amicable mood, and went on with his own occupation as unobtrusively as possible meanwhile, neither avoiding the men nor seeking any intercourse with them. It would have been dangerous at the moment to show either fear or irritation; too much meekness would have been as unadvisable as too little temper. He knew that he was the chief protector of Agnes and the child; every little comfort that was possible in their position he assured to them. He was working now with his penknife at some bits of timber, trying to make them into something

serviceable. The sailors had, so far, shown great good-nature in permitting him to take the lion's share of the few materials they had at command ; they were aware that it was not for his own use he took possession of them and toiled at them so ingeniously. It would be disastrous, therefore, for them to take a grudge against him ; it would be terrible if they came to an open quarrel.

His patience and silence seemed to produce no good result, however. The men were too much disheartened by their new calamity to apply themselves to any task ; and their temper did not improve with hours of idleness and grumbling. The worst of them, deceived by Henry Dilworth's quiet manner, began to show a bullying spirit.

It was towards evening that he separated himself from his companions and went up to Henry Dilworth.

“Look here,” he said, “you stop that. You've helped yourself to enough already. We'll not stand any more of it.”

Henry Dilworth glanced at him and then at the other men, to see what mood they were in. They stood aloof, watching with doubtful but gloomy faces.

Henry Dilworth stooped over his work again and answered quietly, "What do you want it for? It's too good for fire-wood, so long as we've anything else; but if you want it for anything useful you must have it."

"What is it to you what I want it for? You've played the master long enough. You'll make yourself comfortable here while you watch us starve. We'll be hanged if we stand it."

Henry Dilworth stood upright and looked at him.

"Have I made myself more comfortable than any one of you? Have I helped myself to anything you've not got?"

"You're fine at talking; and so you were when you stopped us going off in the boat. You've stopped it for good and all now. But there's more ways of dying

than drowning, or than starving either. And if you've fastened us here to die, I'll take care that you're not the last of us to do it."

He raised his voice as he spoke. The men drew a little nearer with a murmur of excitement, and Agnes, who had gone into her hut again, was attracted by the sound and came out with a frightened look.

Henry Dilworth spoke in a clear voice that all the men might hear him.

"My chances of life are the same as yours; I could do nothing to harm you without harming myself."

"Nay, but they're not. You're a landsman, and your best chance is on land. We're sailors, and our best chance is at sea. I've heard 'em say as you can live days and weeks without food so long as you've a drop of water, and so you're right enough where the rest of us will starve. You've cut away that boat to keep us where we are, and we're all as good as dead men now."

“It’s true enough,” murmured some of the watchers.

“It’s a great lie,” said Henry Dilworth.

Whether he had for the moment lost his temper, or whether he thought the bullying was going too far and that it was time to assert himself, is a difficult question to decide. He folded his arms, looked at his opponent, and uttered his retort distinctly.

There was a murmur and a movement among the onlookers: the angry sailor himself stepped forward with a gesture of rage. Henry Dilworth was the biggest man present, and in spite of his strong words, the calmest; but it seemed to Agnes at that moment that the whole crowd of men was about to attack him.

She had stood in the background before, unnoticed by either of the opponents. Her instincts were to remain sheltered and out of sight. She had none of that courage which prompts even timid creatures to rush into danger for the sake of sharing it

with those who are dear to them. But Henry Dilworth's safety was hers : his life was her hope and comfort: without him she was lost. Therefore she went forward now, put her delicate hand on his arm, and stood facing the men with parted lips, and the courage of despair.

There was a pause of surprise. Henry Dilworth glanced down upon her, smiled a little and said :

“ It's all right, Miss Leake. Hard words break no bones, you know.”

She turned to him, and the expression in her eyes changed to that glance of unfathomable melancholy with which she was used to meet his sympathetic smile.

“ But why do they look so? It frightens me. And yet I dare not go away.”

“ No, don't go. Stay and hear how little it all means. Isn't it a shame, men, to think that with death so near us all, as it may be, we must quarrel enough to frighten the only woman we've got with us? ”

Most of the sailors looked crestfallen ; the appearance of Agnes, and the manner of the accused, made them begin to feel that they were in the wrong. But the principal aggressor muttered something about hiding behind a woman.

“ Well, I’m not ashamed of it,” Henry Dilworth answered. “ I’ve no right to quarrel, and that’s a fact. No more have you, any of you, while we’re stuck fast on this island. What’ll they think of us in England, if we ever get there, and they hear that we couldn’t agree among ourselves in such a hole as this?—if it’s said of us that we frightened the lady and child as badly as the shipwreck itself frightened them? Let’s have no more of it.”

“ That’s all very well,” growled the sailor; “ it’s us that have to be satisfied, not you.”

“ Look here,” said Henry Dilworth, with a quiet and apparently unconscious movement shaking himself free from Agnes, and stepping forward alone; “ if you thought

I'd done an act of treachery against the lot of you, you'd have reason to be angry ; treachery would be a vile enough thing at such a time. But you're only vexed because the boat's gone : I've given you my word that it's not my fault. I'd have risked my life to keep it there ; and I think when you've time to see it properly, you'll say as much."

"Well," said one of the men, with judicial slowness, "I don't know as we've a right to say you did it ; and like enough you didn't. You never did a dirty trick before, not as I know on."

"Thank you," said Henry Dilworth ; "I never did ; and I hope I never shall. If I advised you badly, that's another matter. I don't think I did ; and I meant it for the best."

"We'll not fight about it, anyhow. It's true as we've no call to fall out among ourselves. There's trouble enough without that ; but hungry men have short tempers. Come along, Bill, it's not your business

more than any one else's. Let's be off to better work than having words."

The men moved away in a body, more or less sulkily, and after rather a heated discussion among themselves, they scattered to their neglected occupations. Agnes was left alone with Henry Dilworth.

He had resumed his interrupted work, and he took no notice of Agnes, who sat down on the ground near him. It was not a moment when he would have chosen to look into her mind, or to offer any expressions of sympathy. His own equanimity was too deeply disturbed, his own feelings were too near the surface.

Nevertheless he was uneasily conscious of her presence, and after a short time he found it impossible to ignore the fact that, with her hand before her face to conceal it, she was quietly crying.

A reaction had followed her burst of courage and self-assertion; the little attention he had paid to her interference, and his apparent forgetfulness of her afterwards,

chilled her strangely. She had been used to close personal sympathy, to tender personal attachments; the coldness of his great kindness, the indifference and distance of his manners, for the first time made her feel alone even with him. She was a helpless child, and he a strong man; what did he know of her feelings, or what did he care?

He put down the board at last and turned round to her.

“I am afraid those foolish men have frightened you, Miss Leake.”

“It isn’t that,” Agnes answered in a low voice, which she tried to steady; “I *was* frightened, very much. But now—it is because—you don’t seem to mind.”

“I—don’t mind?”

He shut up his knife deliberately and restored it to his pocket; then he stood looking at her.

“Oh, I know you are kind to me,” she said, with some petulance; “you saved my life, and have done everything for me. But

—you don't really care ; nobody does ; and —I've never been used to nobody caring."

He looked at her curiously, and did not answer. He walked away a little distance, and came back again.

"What do you want me to do ?"

"Do ?" she repeated. "Nothing. You do everything you can. But you don't understand ; you don't care, really. It made me miserable when I thought those men were going to hurt you ; and you don't mind what I feel at all. You are never miserable. You feel nothing—nothing !"

"Not when I see you in trouble, and can't help you ?" he asked, in a subdued voice.

"Oh, you are sorry for me, I know."

"Sorry for you !" he repeated with a gesture of impatience. "What more would you have ? what more *will* you have ? It's all here."

He put out both hands towards her as if he expected her to take them ; then he

drew back suddenly and said, "Miss Leake, don't try me more when I am tried enough already."

"I don't understand," she answered, looking up earnestly into his face.

He walked away a few paces again, and came back with an altered look.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "I was talking nonsense. Don't think of it."



CHAPTER II.

A DESERT SOLITUDE.

THE life of castaways on a desert island is ordinarily monotonous in its misery, and the accounts of sufferings in actual shipwrecks are as brief as they are significant. One day resembles another: one misery is like the last; a few paragraphs are all that can be written to represent days or weeks of suffering; little food, no fuel, no shelter, describes often enough in six words a condition which lasts through endless hours and culminates in death.

In after years Agnes could tell but little of her experience on the island. It was horrible; she was wretched; she thought continually of those at home, and Henry Dilworth was kind to her. That was the brief substance of a long endurance.

The good ship "Swan" was reckoned after a time among the "missing with all hands."

There were mourners in Australia and mourners in England. Black dresses and crape were worn in the valley of Elmdale. Agnes and Kate were wept for as among the early dead.

But all the while on her desert island Agnes clung passionately to life, protesting more and more as time went on against the possible end of the suffering, feeling herself shut out in her young fulness of hope from the living world, thinking sometimes with bitter tears, "Now they are getting used to it; now they are forgetting; now perhaps they are saying, 'She is better off, poor thing,' when all the time I am wanting help as I never did before."

"Why should they think we are dead?" she would say fretfully to Henry Dilworth; "why don't they send to look for us?"

Then, with a sudden thought, she added once, "Perhaps Kate is not dead, nor Jack. Perhaps they are waiting too."

But Henry Dilworth answered sadly, shaking his head, "It isn't possible."

What Henry Dilworth was to her in those days of wretchedness she could never adequately describe. She did not realize it at the time ; it was only afterwards that she looked back and saw how he had made it possible for her to go on living, when without him she would have died. His care protected her from the extremes of physical suffering which her frail body could not have resisted ; his sympathy was the moral support which prevented her mind from yielding to that hopeless depression which threatened to overcome her. It was he who built the little hut which sheltered her and the child after their first few nights on shore; it was he who relinquished his own share of the store of food in order to eke out hers and make it last longer, contenting himself altogether with the nauseous sea-birds' flesh. It was he who netted a hammock of string, and even contrived a pillow of sea-birds' feathers for

her use, so that she was no longer compelled to sleep on the hard damp ground. In every way possible he alleviated the hardships of her position, and mitigated its lonely misery.

The other men were kind but rough; they could not understand her feelings, and she had no pleasure in speaking to them. But Henry Dilworth was sympathetic as well as patient. He would listen for hours when she talked of home and described to him her happy life and the kindly people there. She asked for no information in return for all she gave to him; she showed no interest in his past career or present situation. She might have imagined that he had no personal history, that his life began with her need of his help and sympathy. For the adventures he had related on the vessel remained mere idle tales to her, having no reality, no bearing on his actual existence.

In spite of all his efforts to alleviate the hardship of her position, she suffered

miserably, physically as well as mentally. Her health began to fail, her strength decreased, and her appetite lessened as the quality of the food which it was possible to offer to her deteriorated.

Then the little boy sickened and died. It was some disappointment to Henry Dilworth to find how little sympathy she, who demanded so much herself, had for the ailing child. His illness did not rouse her to helpful exertion ; she shrank, on the contrary, from seeing him ; and expressed more than once a dread of his dying in her presence. Henry Dilworth took him from her hut to his own, and nursed him there.

That was a miserable time for Agnes. She saw less of Henry Dilworth than usual, and, even when she saw him, she evidently occupied less of his thoughts than before. There was a need stronger than hers at the moment, and he did not fail to answer to it. His loving care of the child, his sympathy, his patience, won back to him the hearts of the rough but kindly sailors ; and they were

inclined to do what they could to help in his work of mercy. Only Agnes stood aloof, perplexed, fretful, miserable. She did not like the child, which had, indeed, nothing pretty or pleasing about it; she liked it still less for being ill; she felt only that its sickness added to the misery, that its death would increase the horror of the place.

But when it was all over and the little sufferer was laid in his dreary grave, to suffer no more, Henry Dilworth first forgave, and afterwards forgot, the insensibility of Agnes. She could not help it, he thought; she was too frail herself to endure the reflected sufferings of others. Her sweet appealing look had no hint of selfishness in it; her attitude of gentle demand was beautiful enough to seem right and reasonable; her timidity and meekness put a pleasing veil over anything which might have seemed ugly or obtrusive in her demands on others.

Her failing strength and increasing

hopelessness gave her at last an apparent patience ; she ceased to complain, ceased to ask for anything, but sat with weary looks in a silence that refused to be comforted.

It moved Henry Dilworth to unutterable pity to see the dreary melancholy in her worn face, the face which had been so soft in its outlines, so hopeful in its expression.

After the first few weeks she shrank from much talk, even with him her eyes ; alone perpetually demanded some help, some change, something to be done to put an end to horrors too great to be borne ; and yet it seemed, as the weeks went on to months and still no succour came, that there was nothing left for him to do for her ; he could only watch her die.

It was the hardest thing he had endured in his life to pass those days on the island without the possibility of procuring a single one of all the comforts needed by the sick girl. Her pathetic eyes haunted him, even in the darkness ; her faint and weary voice

sounded in his ears like a perpetual reproach. It comforted him little to know that her life had been prolonged so far chiefly by his efforts on her behalf; it was little satisfaction to feel that he had already done very much, so long as that much was miserably inadequate.

A dull depression overcame at last the spirits of all on the island. They clung to life with the obstinacy of an inherited instinct, but it was a life devoid of any sort of satisfaction, and lighted only by a tiny spark of hope.

This hope was kindled to a blaze—once, twice, three times—by the appearance of a far-off ship. It was only a speck on the horizon, but it meant to them food and shelter, safety and home. They greeted the appearance of the first ship with tumultuous delight, and believed their deliverance secure. But all their efforts to attract attention proved useless; the ship passed on and made no sign of having seen them. It was the same with the second and

third vessels which were sighted on the far-off horizon; and these repeated disappointments produced an impatient excitement among the men not easy to control. Henry Dilworth regarded the appearance of the ships one after another as a hopeful sign. It was evident that whaling or some other business brought vessels near the island at this season of the year, and he considered it impossible that many could pass without observing the signals of distress made from the cliffs.

But the agitation and suspense were injurious to Agnes, and threatened to extinguish the faint spark of life left in her. It flickered up brightly with the coming of hope, only to die down into a dim glimmer when the hope passed away. When a ship was announced to be in sight, the brightness came back to her eye and a flush to her hollow cheek; she found strength to clamber up the rocks, and from the highest point to watch with the rest the movements of that insignificant speck which filled them

all with overpowering excitement. When the speck became fainter and smaller and finally disappeared, the deadly pallor returned to the young girl's cheek and the trembling weakness to her limbs. She needed the help of Henry Dilworth to struggle back to her hut and there lie down breathless and exhausted in the hammock he had made for her.

It grieved him at those times to let her go in alone, and to hear her sobbing afterwards in the silence and darkness of the place. Outside he paced about in a fever of rebellion, for it was dreadful to him to feel that he could not give to her the tender care which she would have had at such a moment from a mother or a sister. She was so weak now that it had become an effort for her to do anything for herself; and he would have chosen to nurse her as he had nursed the little boy, to be at her call every hour of the day and night.

She could struggle in and out of her

hut in the daytime, to look at the sunshine, and to eat the miserable meals which his cooking made the most of for her sake; but he knew that her nights were wretched, that she could not sleep much, that when she did sleep she was afflicted by dreadful dreams, from which she woke shivering and terrified.

“If many more ships come—and go,” she said to him, “it will kill me, I know; my heart beats so that I can hardly bear it afterwards.”

When the third ship disappeared from sight she was sitting with the rest on the highest point of the island beside the bonfire which had been made. The daylight was fading; the sinking sun and all the sea were being swallowed up in a dull mist. She looked over the narrowing expanse of water with an expression of hopelessness.

“If another comes,” she said to Henry Dilworth, “it will be too late now.”

“Let me take you back to your cabin,”

was all he answered ; "it is getting very cold here."

"Do you think I can get back ?" she said. "I feel as if I could never walk again."

"You are tired ; you want rest ; give me your hand ; it is too far to come."

"I thought it was for the last time," she said ; "that I should *never* go back to the hut, I mean. Why should I go ? I might as well die here."

"You are not dying ; and if you cannot walk I will carry you."

She smiled faintly. "It isn't quite so bad as that yet, I think."

Nevertheless, when she rose to her feet she trembled very much, and seemed hardly able to stand. He put his arm round her supportingly, and she leaned against him trembling still.

"You are sorry for me, are you not ?" she asked, looking wistfully into his face.

"A great deal more than sorry."

She glanced round her drearily, taking in all the dreary features of the place.

“I think I shall never come here again,” she said; “to day was my last chance. Let us go.”

With the help of his supporting arm she made her way slowly back to her hut. At the door of it she paused breathless, and leaning against Henry Dilworth looked again into his face.

“If I die, and they come in time, don’t leave me here; don’t bury me here; take me with you.”

It was a strange request, and it moved him strangely.

“If I can’t take you with me alive, it seems as if I shouldn’t care to go myself!” he answered.

She looked at him with a faint surprise and pleasure.

“Do you care so much?” she said; “that is more than being kind.”

She seemed reluctant to enter the solitary comfortless hut; she had glanced

at it once with a shrinking movement; now she remained leaning against his arm, as if she found strength as well as rest there.

“Don’t go far away,” she said suddenly. “I am afraid.”

“I will stay near enough to hear if you speak to me,” he answered.

“And if I die, bring me out; don’t leave me to die in the dark alone.”

“I will come if you speak,” he repeated.

The position was beyond words. He did not know how to offer all the pitying tenderness which he felt.

She turned her eyes to him earnestly as if with an unuttered question.

“And speak to me; tell me you are sorry; don’t let me die, as if no one cared.”

She looked away again over the sea, and then back to his face.

“They care at home; they love me. They would come if they could, to be with me and make it easier. But they

are far away, and they don't know ; they think I am dead already. You are here, only you. You must not let me feel alone, forgotten. You must tell me—oh ! it's no use," she broke off suddenly ; " what do I want ? " and, raising herself from his support, she went into the hut.

Henry Dilworth made no effort to sleep that night. Through all the long hours of it he paced up and down outside her door. He could not rest, could not cease to think of her for a moment. She was in such terrible need of loving care, of the closest tenderness, that it was a dreadful thing to leave her to spend those hours of darkness alone, looking into the coming face of death. If only he could have sat beside her to chafe her cold hands and speak reassuringly, that would at least have been some comfort to her, though but a small part of all she needed. Never before had he been in a position where help was urgently required of a sort which he could not give, and it was miserable

to him to feel that she missed the many personal attentions which a woman could have given in his place.

“When she is dying it will be too late,” he said to himself. “I want to save her life.”

As he walked up and down in the fog and darkness outside her door, a thought came to him which flushed his face and quickened his steps.

“If it were possible it might be worth while, even for her sake. There is no other way in which I could have the chance of doing the best for her and keeping her alive. But it isn’t possible here, even if she would consent.”

She was so young, he thought, to die for the want of that care and tenderness which it would have been his delight to lavish upon her; so young; and she might be saved for a life of happiness and love!

With the sinking of the sun the wind had fallen to a dead calm, and with its

falling the hopes of Henry Dilworth sank lower. It was the wind, probably, which had driven the ships so near the island ; if it passed away, the chance of more vessels following the same course would be lessened.

A thick mist crept over the sea stealthily and steadily as the hours darkened to midnight. It hushed the heaving waters ; it swallowed up the outlying rocks and the white foam on the shore ; it covered the island and clung about it.

When morning broke, the air was very still. A deep calm reigned over the invisible sea : hardly was the dull thunder of the breakers heard on the rocks below. The daylight struggled feebly through the mist ; no sun was at first to be seen ; but towards noon the light grew stronger, the fog lifted, and suddenly the sea was visible. A great shout went up from the sailors who were standing near the shore, and the shout awakened Agnes from a late uneasy slumber.

She rose on her elbow and listened, her heart beating painfully. There was something strange, wild, jubilant in the shout, and she could not tell what it might portend.

Then she heard the voice of Henry Dilworth at her door—that voice which had been so often to her the assurance of help:

“Are you awake, Miss Leake?”

She could not speak to answer him, but she sat up in her hammock, and drew her rain-cloak more tightly about her, looking expectantly at the door.

Henry Dilworth was alarmed by the silence. For a moment he thought that his worst fears were realized. He pushed open the rickety door, and went straight in.

When he saw her leaning forward in her hammock, gazing at him, fearfully, entreatingly, as if she dreaded his errand, and begged him to spare her more shocks of disappointment, he could find no words

to tell her his news without startling her. He lifted her in his arms and carried her out to look at the sea.

There was no need of any explanation.

The pale sun shone through the mist still hanging about the sea, and shed a chilly gleam on the grey water, where, with her image reflected on the shining surface, lay a ship at anchor; and a little boat was already making for the land.



CHAPTER III.

FROM DEATH TO LIFE.

IT did not take long for the inhabitants of the island to prepare for their departure. Where no one had a second suit of clothes, and every one had lived and slept for five months in the dress he stood in, there was no packing of trunks nor any changing of costumes. The accumulated possessions of them all did not include anything worth carrying away ; the very kettle—the one cooking utensil they had been provided with —had suffered from overwork, and was no longer in a condition to do much service to any one. The clothes of the men were ragged and worn ; some of them had lost their hats, and nearly all were barefoot.

Agnes alone, the most helpless and therefore the most protected of those on

the island, still appeared in tolerable garments, worn and faded though they were.

The men rushed down to the beach with wild cries of joy. They were soon shouting directions to the sailors in the boat which was drawing near. The calmness of the sea made it easier to approach the shore than it had been on the first arrival of the shipwrecked, and the sailors plunged through the water to scramble into the boat before it touched the land. In the excitement they had forgotten everything except their own unexpected rescue ; but when, in a tumult of delight, they had shaken hands with their deliverers, they remembered, not without a tinge of shame, that there was some one else to think of.

“The lady ! There’s the lady !” they said.

“If she’s alive yet,” added one ; “for she seemed bad enough last night. Perhaps Mr. Dilworth’s gone for her.”

The strange sailors rested on their oars and looked up at the island. Even in calm

weather it was not possible to row right in to the strip of beach without danger or injury to the boat from the pointed rocks over which the breakers foamed.

“Bring the boat round here,” they heard the voice of Henry Dilworth calling to them.

Then they saw that he had carried Agnes down to the projecting piece of rock where she and the child had landed on their first arrival. It was in a sheltered nook of the cliff, where the water was calmer than beside the beach, but the rocks rose straight from the level of the sea.

One of the sailors went on shore and clambered round to Henry Dilworth’s assistance. Together the two men slung Agnes gently down in her own hammock to the boat waiting underneath. Then they slipped down the rope after her, and were ready to go.

The new-comers had been sufficiently impressed by the gaunt faces and ragged garments of the shipwrecked sailors: they

had welcomed them with somewhat boisterous sympathy. The pale, worn face of Agnes touched them differently and subdued them almost to silence; only low murmurs and shakings of the head signified the melancholy view they took of her case.

“Poor thing! she’s far gone;” or, “I reckon we’re too late,” and so on; while Henry Dilworth arranged Agnes as comfortably as he could, and the others looked on as if afraid to touch so broken a thing. She glanced round her meanwhile with bright anxious eyes, and tried to catch what the men were saying.

“It isn’t too late, is it?” she appealed to Henry Dilworth. “I shall not die now; I shall go home.”

“I think you won’t die now. I hope you will go home.”

He had fixed her in the easiest position he could contrive under the circumstances, and now he told the men to go on.

But when the boat began to move

through the water, the eagerness of Agnes to watch the ship looming nearer and larger overcame her sense of fatigue ; she was not content to remain lying as he had placed her ; she begged to be raised and supported so that she could see properly. Henry Dilworth was obliged to put his arm under her head and lift it. She rested then against his shoulder with all the unconsciousness given by absorbing excitement ; and she turned her bright eyes to him from time to time with a look that demanded sympathy and encouragement in her new hope of life.

In the stillness of the strange light shining over the tranquil sea, with the cries of the sea-birds in their ears, they drew nearer to the ship. She seemed to Agnes a beautiful thing, a heaven-sent messenger, a home, or at least a certain way to one. The horror of those barren rocks which rose out of the grey waters was left behind for ever. Agnes was safe, she would get well, she would see her friends again.

These were the only thoughts in her mind at the moment. It was not strange to her to rest on Henry Dilworth's shoulder, or to feel the pressure of his supporting arm ; but to him—at this moment, when he saw that their parting must be near—it was strange indeed, and bitter as well as sweet, to feel her leaning on him so.

They reached the ship ; and Agnes was given up to the care of the captain's wife, the only woman on board. The good creature received her with every womanly attention, lent her clothes, put her to bed in her own cabin, and tended her with her own hands. Afterwards she went up to make her report to "the gentleman" on the condition of "the lady." She was somewhat surprised when Henry Dilworth spoke of the latter personage as "Miss Leake."

"The lady's not your wife, then ? "

"Certainly not. She lost her friends in the wreck, and has had no one except me and the sailors to look after her since."

This little mistake vexed him. It added to his uneasiness and the perplexity of the situation. He saw his own line of duty clearly enough; but did Agnes see it in the same way? Would she understand him? When would she awake to the knowledge that they had returned to the civilized world, and that he had no longer a right to be to her all that he had been in their desolate retreat?

For one whole day the calm weather compelled the ship to remain within sight of the island. The grey sea, and the black rocks, the thick and heavy air hanging about them, made up a melancholy picture for those just escaped to gaze upon. The fog had lifted and thinned; but the sun's rays were chilled as they passed through it; far distances were hidden, nearer distances blurred and magnified. The island itself looked unreal, revealed in a gap of the mist, the waters calm about it, the rocks reflected; a clearly-defined thing amid a world of concealment; it was as if the

corner of a curtain had been raised to reveal a lurking horror underneath.

“It is like a nightmare to look at that dreadful place,” Agnes said to Henry Dilworth, when, refreshed by food and sleep, she sat on the deck some hours later. “When I shut my eyes I shall always see it —always.”

“I think not. After a time you will forget,” he said gently, with a thought of other things which would pass away from her memory too.

“At least it is good to see it only; not to feel or touch it any more,” Agnes went on. “It was like a prison that had got hold of us and never meant to let us go. Even now it keeps us here. I should be afraid still if I were alone; but when I look at you I feel that it is all right.”

He did not answer her. The time was over when such statements seemed natural and easy to respond to. Therefore he received her hopeful speeches in a strange silence which she was too much excited to

remark. She seemed to be conscious of no change in their relation to one another, and she expected him to care for her comfort now as he had cared for it on the desolate island.

With the dawn of the next day the wind rose, and the island was left far behind. Henry Dilworth had already begun to think of the future, and it surprised him a little that Agnes should have formed no plans for herself, or at least should speak of none.

The fact was, she took it absolutely for granted that she would return home at once, in the quickest and most comfortable way, and that he would see to all necessary arrangements on her behalf. She did not even remember that he might not be going to England at all, that his business would probably take him in an opposite direction. She had grown used to his care, and looked upon it now as a necessity, if not a right. Under no circumstances would she have expected to look after her own affairs. If he

had not been present, she would have been compelled to appeal for help to some one else. If she had been put on the vessel alone she would hardly have attempted to plan her homeward journey herself, but rather, having signified her address, she would have expected to be handed on from captain to captain, like a bale of goods well labelled, until she reached her right destination. Ways and means of travel were wholly beyond her knowledge ; her people at home would repay all trouble taken on her behalf, and meanwhile it was natural that some one should be kind to her and tell her what to do.

Now that the terrible privations of the island oppressed her no longer, now that safety took the place of danger, and hope replaced despair, she found in her intercourse with Henry Dilworth something that was more than consolation, that was actually enjoyment. Never before had any one on whom she had grown accustomed to rely mingled deference with tender care. Her

lovers in the past had not touched her heart; there had been no need for her to rest on their kindness, no occasion to rely on their knowledge. Her brothers and sisters, on the other hand, had found in her no qualities to wonder at or to admire with reverence.

Henry Dilworth laid the flattering homage of a suitor at her feet while wrapping her about with the tender care of a guardian and protector. How could she fail, then, to find a charm in this intercourse which led her to the delights of a new experience through the safe and well-trodden paths of old feelings and habits?

While he thought of the parting to come, walking carefully with his eyes fixed on the end near at hand, that nothing might be done which would look strange in the light of that separation which he believed to be inevitable, she never thought of any end to their intercourse, any future which would contradict this present.

She had never yet begun a friendship

which had not gone on as steadily as life itself went on in Elmdale. Her affections had been almost exclusively confined to her family circle; these had, as a matter of course, no ebbing or flowing, but coursed evenly onward through the months and years. She had never known what it was to be intimate with persons whom she was destined to forget; and Henry Dilworth had long since ceased to appear a mere episode in her life. Outside her home circle he had become its mainspring; she did not even think of the home circle without feeling as if she were speaking of it to him. That reflection of her own life which she found in the sympathy of another, and which was essential to her happiness, she had received from him more completely than from any one else. It did not occur to her that the life must soon arrange itself without it, or that the moment was approaching when Henry Dilworth must pass out of her existence completely and for ever.

CHAPTER IV.

A STRANGE EXPERIMENT.

IN an unhome-like foreign-looking room in a South American port Agnes sat alone. She had not yet been on shore twelve hours, but already she was horrified at the place and frightened at her solitude there. After recommending her to the attention of the landlady—a woman who couldn't speak English—Henry Dilworth had gone out to transact business, and had only looked in a few minutes at noon to ask how she was.

She had been much better on board the ship than on the island; food and comparative comfort, with hope and freedom from anxiety, had given her injured health a chance of recovery. But already the bright look of anticipation had faded out

of her face; repugnance, perplexity, and dread were expressed there instead. She was pale, the corners of her mouth drooped; she looked tired and dispirited. A meal had been set before her, but she did not taste it; she sat quite still, leaning back in her chair and looking continually at the door.

She was discouraged, melancholy, frightened. The sailors had of course dispersed, and she did not expect, or desire, to see them any more; but why did Mr. Dilworth leave her alone among strange people—foreigners, whom she couldn't understand and didn't like? There was no room for real terror here, but nervous dislike of strange customs and dread of uncomfortable situations took its place.

She looked at the food and could not eat it; she hated to take a meal alone. Why did he not come back and speak to her? She might have been very ill, she might have wanted a hundred things in his absence. He had been for so many months

almost always within her call, and now he was already lost to her in a foreign town, the streets of which were at this moment more terrifying to her, more unexplorable, than had been the desolate cliffs of her island prison. While she stayed indoors she had no one to appeal to ; and if she went out she would certainly never find her way back. She was like a neglected child, ready to cry because its nurse had gone away and forgotten it.

At last Henry Dilworth returned, but hardly in the anxious and sympathetic mood she had expected. He had an absorbed and somewhat disturbed expression on his face ; he was like a man who has business on hand which he does not care to do, and which he is resolved to get over as soon as possible. But she was too glad to see him to study his looks. She uttered a little cry of pleasure and reproach.

“ What a long time you have been away ! ”

“Yes, there was a good deal to do.”

He glanced at the table, and a little frown of disappointment wrinkled itself on his forehead.

“Haven’t you dined? I hoped I had given you time enough. I told them to bring it in to you, and then I thought you would be ready to talk to me.”

“I am ready, quite ready. How could I eat all by myself? It was so lonely, and I was frightened.”

“Frightened?”

“I didn’t know where you had gone, and I couldn’t make these people understand me. Suppose I had been ill?” she added with some petulance.

He looked at her anxiously.

“You don’t feel so, I hope? You haven’t wanted anything?”

“I don’t know. I feel very miserable and lonely in this strange place; and I didn’t know when you would come back.”

“I was sure to come back. But you

must have something to eat now. This is the way to be ill—to have no dinner."

"How *can* I eat alone?" she repeated; "but you'll have something with me, won't you? Tell them to bring in more things."

"I would rather not, thank you. I will serve you, if you'll let me. I've had what I require."

"Oh, while I was waiting!"

Her voice trembled, and a tear fell on her dress.

"Miss Leake," he said, with grave impatience unlike his habitual compassionate indulgence; "you don't mean that you waited for me to come and dine with you?"

"Why not?" she asked, looking at him with no attempt to conceal the shining drops in her eyes.

He hesitated, looked at her, and then said gravely and quietly, "Never mind. It does not matter. If you will eat something first, we will talk about other things afterwards."

“I can’t eat; I’m not hungry,” she answered shortly.

From his eyes it seemed as if distress was now added to his perplexity. He sat down, looked at her silently, and sighed.

“You look tired,” he said abruptly.

“It doesn’t matter,” she answered, the corners of her mouth trembling; “I’m *sure* to be tired.”

He moved his hand over his forehead in a troubled manner; then he seemed to shake off with an effort the impression her words had made on him, and he asked gravely and gently, “Are you fit to talk about arrangements to-night, or shall we wait until to-morrow?”

“Arrangements? I don’t understand.”

“What you will do—how you will get home, I mean.”

“Oh!” There was some surprise in the little exclamation, some perplexity also.

“Of course, you will go back to England, to your friends, as soon as you can.”

She looked at him with a kind of wonder. She had not expected him to state so self-evident a fact.

“There is one thing I want to ask you,” he went on rather hurriedly, “before I forget. Have you any money?”

Her face had grown pale. No more tears gathered in her eyes, which opened wider and looked at him with a species of dread, as if she felt afraid of what he might be going to say. Mechanically she took her purse from her pocket and emptied its contents on the table before him.

She was sitting at one corner of it, and he on the opposite side. Two sovereigns and some silver rolled out.

“You will want some more,” he said; “will you take this and put it in your purse? Your friends will pay me back when you get to them.”

She took the coins indifferently; no reluctance about accepting them troubled her; of course people would provide her

with what she needed until she got home, and then Susie would pay them ; but she asked, " Why should I take it now ? Won't it do when I want it ? I never pay for things myself ; people would cheat me."

" It is for the other end. I can arrange for your passage, and your bill here. But you must not land in England without money."

" They will meet me."

" If they shouldn't ? "

" You can give it to me, then, when I want it."

He looked at her steadily ; her eyes met his with an appealing, entreating confidence difficult to answer at the moment, yet he felt compelled to speak.

" I am going to Australia," he said.

" To—Australia ? "

Her face became even paler than it was before ; the thin hands resting on her knee closed in a nervous clasp ; he could not take his eyes from hers, and that made the effort to go on much harder ;

but having begun, he seemed to have no further choice.

“I was going to Australia before. My business is there. I have none in England.”

“No,” she assented in a low voice, still watching his lips as he spoke.

“You are safe here now, there is nothing more I can do for you; you will go home by the next ship. One is expected to touch in a few days. The consul will see you on board. I have spoken to him about you.”

“The consul?”

If he had said the North Pole it would have been as intelligible to her.

“The people here will make you as comfortable as they can till the ship arrives. You will have no difficulty at all.”

“I am to stay here—alone?”

“For a few days only.”

“And I am to go to England—alone?”

“Did you expect anything else?”

She did not answer ; she put her clasped hands on the table and laid her head down on them ; then there was a long silence.

Henry Dilworth got up and moved away restlessly.

“ Is there anything you would like me to do ? ” he asked. He felt that he had been clumsy, brutal ; and yet for her own sake it seemed necessary that the tie between them should be speedily cut, before it was knotted fast enough to bring to her unhappiness and to him reproach. Here was a situation in which his general capability did not help him ; he was always ready to *do* things, but to leave them undone gracefully was another matter. It had been very simple to take care of this poor girl and be kind to her, when that was his evident duty ; to leave her now, when the duty was done and the need for him over, was altogether different. Yet his own reluctance was a warning to him. He was altogether too much interested in her to continue a protection

which could be more safely given—and as efficiently—by an indifferent person.

She did not answer at first. When she lifted her face it was white and despondent. She looked as if the knowledge that she must face the world alone had taken her poor little chance of life away.

“I shall never get to England without you,” she said in a low voice, as if she spoke to herself.

He glanced at her with quick compunction. It seemed, indeed, as if she spoke the truth. Her worn face and wasted hands told how small an amount of vitality her sufferings had left to her. Abandoned to the care of strangers, deprived of that confidential sympathy which seemed essential to her, would not her spark of life go out before it could be rekindled at the warm fire of home?

“Did you expect me to go with you?” he asked.

“I never thought of anything else.”

“Would you like me to go?”

A faint colour came back to her face, and an eager question into her eyes, but she did not speak.

“After all, what could I do for you? On the island there was no one else, no one more fit; but now any woman will nurse you and look after you as I cannot do.”

She leaned back in her chair and sighed a little.

“It is not nursing I want.”

“It *is* nursing that you want,” he repeated impatiently. He was looking at her keenly, but he spoke as much to himself as to her; “without it I don’t know how you’ll pull through.”

“I don’t care if I don’t pull through,” said Agnes, turning her face away with a flush of passion.

“As for anything else,” he went on, without replying to her observation, “how can I take care of you? What can I do for you? I have no *right* to take care of you now.”

“No right? I don’t understand. There is no one else—if you *cared* to do.”

“Miss Leake!” He came nearer and stood before her, the corner of the table between them. “There is one way in which I could be *all* you need—only one; but it is impossible.”

She shook her head wearily as a sign that she did not understand. He stood looking at her, his face flushed, his eyes observant. He was no longer the man who had made up his mind to do a disagreeable thing, and who was doing it clumsily and reluctantly. He was more like one who sees a new opening before him, difficult but possible, and who studies its obstacles with growing determination.

That thought which had come to him in the last night on the island, and which he had since dismissed as a treason to her confidence in him, returned to him now.

It had first flashed on his mind as holding a forlorn hope for her in her desperate situation; but it had not then

been practicable, even if he had decided that it was advisable. Here it was indeed possible, but it was no longer so necessary, unless, indeed, her weakness and her persistent reliance on him made it so. Would it be kind or unkind to offer her the chance of it?—to give her the opportunity of taking all he had to give, or leaving all untaken?

If she started for England alone, and died by the way, of what use to her would have been his reticence and self-repression? Was not the assurance of life—an assurance which she herself only saw in his continued care and kindness—of more avail to her at this moment than freedom in the future? Was it not, indeed, as necessary for him now to take her life and cherish it as it had been before to save and guard it?

“If she cares for me enough, if it seems a natural thing to her, it might be worth while for her own sake after all.”

So he said to himself as he looked at her. It did not occur to him to balance the good or the evil on his own behalf; the

sole consideration for him at the moment seemed to be her safety, her interest, how best he could take care of her, cherish her into happy hope, nurse her into health, restore her certainly to her friends ; and he could think of one way—only one.

Then he thought of how it could be done, all in the minute in which he stood there looking at her—and he resolved that he would have shaped his intention fully before he disturbed her mind with a further hint.

“There is one way,” he repeated aloud, “but I must see if it can easily be managed here—and how ; then I will speak to you about it. I must leave you again now, but I will see you in an hour or so. Try to rest meanwhile—will you ?”

She threw a glance of repugnance round the room.

“It’s not very comfortable,” he said, but it was so much worse on the island ; and there you were obedient, and did what I said was for your good.”

“On the island you were kind to me,” she replied.

“And not here?” He put his large hands lightly on her two shoulders and looked down into her face; such a young, sweet, and withal desponding face it was that looked at him! He lifted his hands and turned away with an incomprehensible movement of impatience.

“Lie down now, and do try to rest. I shall be in again soon.” And so he left her.

It was growing dusk when he came back. She was lying on a couch with her eyes closed; the uneaten dinner had been taken away.

The landlady spoke to him as he went in. The lady seemed very ill, she remarked; she would eat nothing at all. Did she faint sometimes?—she seemed almost like that when they went in to take the meal away, but they had got her to swallow some wine. She seemed almost like a child, and so delicate. Did she need

a doctor? Shouldn't she have a maid to nurse her and look after her? It was a sad pity that there were no English in the place, so that they could speak to her, poor thing! How did she come to be travelling alone?

Henry Dilworth explained that her friends had been drowned in the wreck: he did not know about the maid; she wouldn't be of much use if she couldn't speak English; he would ask the lady herself; and then he went in to Agnes, shutting the door behind him. Would not he himself, he thought be kinder and more efficient than any hired nurse, if she would give him the right?

She opened her eyes as he came in; and he saw that there were tears on the lashes. One arm was thrown back under her head, which rested uneasily upon it.

“ You don't look comfortable,” Henry Dilworth said; “ let me raise the cushion,” and he went forward and readjusted it.

“ How much better you make it!” she

said, with a faint smile, as her head nestled against it, and her eyes rested mournfully, almost reproachfully, upon him.

“ Yet I am very clumsy, and not used to touching things that want delicate hands about them. Don’t you find that out? Don’t you feel it? ”

“ You always seem able to do the things you want to do,” she answered. “ When you *want* to make me comfortable you can.”

“ But I don’t always want? ”

“ I—suppose not.”

“ Very well; you shall please yourself. If you like my care—if it seems to you sufficient—” and then he paused.

It seemed to him that in his desire to discover her need, irrespective of his own wishes, he was putting the thing brutally. He did not want to persuade her against her own will, nor even indirectly to bring his influence to bear on her decision; he wanted her to act on the impulse of her own feelings, to take the course towards

which her mind instinctively turned in this time of need ; but it was not necessary to frighten and repel her by his abruptness.

He did not feel called upon to speak to her of her friends and their probable wishes, nor yet of the difference in habits and circumstances which would have divided him from her in ordinary times. These he knew, or could guess at ; but the crisis of her fate seemed to carry her beyond their influence now. The question for settlement at the moment appeared to be a simple one, and its answer depended entirely on her own feelings ; there was no need, then, to perplex her with extraneous considerations which were no longer weighty enough to carry decision. He must try to understand what she thought and wished ; if *she* seemed satisfied with the proposition he was about to make, her best chance of life and happiness would rest in his hands, and he would make the most of it for her. If, on the other hand,

she shrank from the idea and was horrified—as seemed to him very possible—their separation would be an easy and simple matter at once; she would make no more protest against it.

He began again more gently:

“ You do not like to go to England alone? ”

“ I am afraid,” she repeated; “ it is a long way. I know no one. I am not *used* to being alone.”

“ I should like to go with you, to take care of you, to look after you, better a great deal than I have done so far. I should like to take you back to your friends well and happy.”

She raised herself eagerly on her elbow and looked at him.

“ Then why can’t you? Is it business—that dreadful thing that gentlemen always talk about when they won’t do the things you want? But they can make it give way, can’t they, when they want to do the things themselves? ”

“Is that it?” he asked with a little smile. “Perhaps it is. Then I want to go England with you very much, and can make the business wait. I should like you to be my first business, my best interest—you are that last already—but there is only one way, and you would not like it.”

“How? I? Why not?”

He was growing more excited every moment. He watched her with eagerness, trying to take in all the indications she gave in her unconsciousness.

“There is one way—if you will go as my wife.”

“Oh!” She leaned back on the couch and looked at him with a sudden wonder.

“If you are angry and wish me to leave you,” he said, gently, “I will go away without another word.”

“No! Wait.”

She leaned back, looking at him with a continued wonder, modified by a growing eagerness, as of awakened expectation. He had watched her keenly, but he had per-

ceived no shrinking movement, nothing that signified instinctive reluctance to this strange idea, however much she might have been taken by surprise.

“I didn’t know—I never thought of that,” she murmured breathlessly.

“I know you didn’t; but it seems to me the only way.”

“And you would take me to England?”

“I would take you wherever you wished.”

“Then in that way you would take care of me always?” she went on, as if speaking to herself.

“If it would satisfy you.”

“And you—would you like it?” she asked with a quick flush and glance at him, as if a new light dawned upon her.

He put his hand on hers, clasping it closely. He had not touched her before, and now it amazed her to feel how his fingers trembled—those fingers which had been steady and strong to help her in time of need.

She looked into his eyes, which met hers with the tender assurance of a love and kindness beyond her understanding; and what she saw satisfied her.

“I think,” she said softly, “that way would do.”

So with clasped hands, but without any kiss, the contract between them was sealed.



CHAPTER V.

ALONE TOGETHER.

IN the necessary interval which elapsed between this sudden betrothal and the strange marriage following it, Henry Dilworth did not act the part of an ideal lover in romance ; he did not even fill the position so completely as Jack Langford had done. But Agnes liked him all the better for this. She was never startled into a perception of the newness of her situation, its difference from any in which she had ever been before. Compliments were as absent as caresses from his intercourse with her. He gave abundant proofs of thoughtful care, but of passionate eagerness none. It is true that he arranged for the marriage to take place at the earliest time possible. "If it is to be, the sooner

the better," was a somewhat enigmatical remark which he made on the point. But she accepted in perfect faith every arrangement which he declared to be good, instinctively feeling that her interest was considered in all he did, more than his own. With her sensitive nature, shrinking from slight or indifference, demanding always more than it gave, she would have detected the first hidden touch of selfishness in his conduct. She was safer ~~than~~, in her simple confidence, she seemed to be; a false note in his kindness, too much flattery, too little consideration, would have shocked her at once. It would not have been easy to deceive her with an apparent generosity; her own selfishness, sweetly hidden as it was from herself and all the world under her gentleness and timidity, was the touchstone with which she tested others, and by which she knew Henry Dilworth to be altogether good and true.

He asked her for no assurance of love;

perhaps he hardly conceived that she could give to him a stronger feeling than that of clinging confidence, and of that confidence he was receiving the most perfect proof. He felt that for her this marriage was only a desperate remedy, adopted in the absence of all others. Until it was actually over he would leave her memory as free as he would have left her heart ; so that if, at the last moment, he could have given her back to her friends as Agnes Leake, and she had chosen to be so given, her past with him would not have left even the recollection of a kiss, as a claim or a taint on her future.

Agnes was content with this novel sort of betrothal, and the marriage which followed so quickly came to her in the way best suited to her nature ; it was the sealing of a bond already involuntarily made, the rectification of an intimacy which had become the principal need of her life.

In ordinary circumstances she would probably have passed from girlhood to

womanhood without feeling her heart touched by any one outside her family circle ; she might have married, as an afterthought, when her first youth was over, and the old ties were thinning around her ; but home attachments were the most natural to her, those which had existed from childhood, and never known a beginning, nor needed any ceremonial confirmation. So long as these subsisted uninjured she had felt no attraction towards attachments that were new and startling. Now, however, she was alone, her family far away, and for some months past Henry Dilworth had been the best substitute she could find for brothers and sisters. It would have been strange to part with him at this moment ; it was much less strange to agree to his proposition and become his wife.

The whole affair was very quiet and unexciting. When, indeed, Henry Dilworth took his wife into his arms for the first time and kissed her, knowing that she was

actually his own, she was a little surprised at the passionate tenderness which he showed; but she only flushed and smiled, and was pleased to think that he loved her so much, for that would make it all nice and easy in the future. He would never be unkind, never seem indifferent, never do the things she did not wish, after the fashion of some husbands that she knew.

She was so bright and happy in the renewed consciousness of "belonging" to somebody, of being no more a solitary wanderer on the face of the earth, that Henry Dilworth marvelled as much as he rejoiced at the success of his experiment. She was a mixture of qualities strange to his experience, now that they unfolded themselves, like shut flowers after rain expanding in the sunshine of hope. She was so exacting and yet so obedient, so tender and yet—but this he never said to himself or any other—so selfish.

One of the first things which she did

after her marriage was to give back to Henry Dilworth the money which he had made her take that first evening on shore.

“Now *you* will buy everything,” she said triumphantly, “I needn’t be afraid of losing my purse any more.”

This action was significant of her theory of life; to casual observers it would have seemed a beautiful example of disinterested confidence; but its meaning was not so simple as this. The partnership into which she entered signified, from her point of view, an abandonment of all difficult things in life to her husband’s care: therefore it was that she began at once to hand over everything troublesome to him, including even money. She would have the things that money could buy, but not the responsibility of paying for them. She understood, indeed, that she must demand within certain limits, but those limits did not exclude the sacrifice of his own comfort and inclinations to

hers. She had married him in order to secure for her own benefit his generous qualities and capable service, and both husband and wife acted upon this foundation as distinctly as if it had been stated in the Marriage Service, though both of them would have refused with indignation to acknowledge it.

Agnes felt her new rights strongly and pleasantly from the very beginning. On the afternoon of her wedding day she begged to be taken for a drive, and she looked at the world with reassured eyes as she sat beside her husband, confident that her weakness and timidity were no longer of any consequence, since his strength and courage were sealed to her service.

His devotion to her wishes at this moment, his intense sympathy, his close attention to all her wants, made her feel how much his kindest kindness had hitherto failed to supply the demands of her nature. Confidential intimacy with some one who belonged to her was essential to her peace

of mind ; therefore the disappearance of all reserve affected her mood as sunshine affects the wings of a butterfly : she was impelled to happy movement and joyous life. Her new experience was all the more agreeable to her, because her husband was not—except in the first moment—passionately demonstrative in his affection ; she was used to continual tenderness, but to no superabundance of caresses ; and now she was quite happy and at rest in Henry Dilworth's company.

When she came back from her drive, tired but not out of spirits, and lay down on the couch to rest, he sat beside her and put his arm under her head, and so she fell asleep like a weary child, the fretfulness gone out of her look ; for she seemed to have put away again the cares of life, to feel satisfied that he would take her home and do all she wanted, without ever troubling to ask how or when.

As he watched her then, he was at last carried away by thoughts and hopes for

himself. Her happiness was his own, and to think of her life was to think of his. Her sweetness and tender confidence seemed to him very beautiful—things beyond his right to possess, but which could not fail to idealize his life and make it a higher thing than he had ever dreamt of. His past, as he looked back upon it, seemed prosaic in comparison with the present; it had unfolded only the possibilities of his own nature; now that nature would be enlarged and ennobled by contact with one of a finer type. It seemed to him that he could not fail to lead a better life because Agnes loved him.

And he thought at that moment that it was altogether in his power to make her happy. She had brought forward no claim so far which he had not been able instantly to satisfy; and he could not imagine that any mere difference of station, anything in past education or old habits, could be sufficiently important to divide them now. His love satisfied her here: it did not occur

to him that it might fail to do so in the home he would make for her. So far she missed nothing, felt no want in his company; and his hopes seemed justified as the days went on, for her happy sense of rest in his care increased rather than diminished.

They did not leave for England by the next vessel which sailed; the accommodation was not very satisfactory on board this particular ship, and Henry Dilworth thought the rest on shore was doing his wife good under the present happier conditions. She would be all the stronger for the voyage after waiting a little. She had ceased to show impatience for that home which she now felt confident of reaching; she was well enough to amuse herself by a little sight-seeing, and she spent a good deal of Henry Dilworth's money without seeming to be aware of it.

He was glad to think that he could afford to be somewhat lavish on her behalf; it seemed to him as natural to spend money for her as to leave it unspent himself. What-

ever, therefore, he did in the company of his wife, was done in the most comfortable and even luxurious manner. Her health demanded it, her habits led her to expect it. But when he was alone he returned to his old ways, and it made Agnes open her eyes with astonishment to discover how economical he was on his own behalf.

“But *why* should you do so?” she asked; for she had happily concluded—as she concluded many things which it was pleasant to believe in the absence of evidence—that he was not short of money; and he had fortunately no reason to interfere with her conclusions.

“Why should I do differently when I am alone?” he replied. “This is the way I am used to.”

This answer perplexed her a little.

“Perhaps it wouldn’t matter if I didn’t know,” she said meditatively; “but I don’t like to think of it; and then”—adding this as a happy thought—“*other people* don’t do it.”

“What other people? More people do my way than yours, dear child; for more people are poor than rich.”

“But it’s because they can’t help it; they change as soon as ever they can. And even if you *used* to do it, that’s no reason why you should go on now. People always make a great difference when they marry! That’s why it costs so much. They spend a great deal more money than they did before—even on themselves.”

“Do they, indeed?” he answered with a smile of some amusement, such as that with which we listen to a child’s pretty prattle on subjects beyond its understanding. “What wonderful things in social economy you will teach me in time!”

There was another thing on which she commented with some doubtfulness, and that was her husband’s letter to her sister Susie. They both wrote to England by that vessel in which they did not sail, sending news of the safety of Agnes and of her marriage.

Henry Dilworth's letter was not, however, wholly satisfactory to his wife. She looked at the letter, and then at him, with an odd expression of perplexity.

"They won't know what you're like when they read it," she said; "you are not like *that*," but she did not specify what "that" might mean.

"I've said all that is necessary, I think," he answered; "your letter tells the rest."

"Oh yes, it's all right," she said slowly.

Then she smiled in his face, and observed, "They will be sure to know that I shouldn't have married you if you hadn't been *nice*."



CHAPTER VI.

THOSE AT HOME.

VERY reluctantly had Miss Leake and her sisters given up all hope of seeing Agnes again, and hearing of the safety of Kate. It was only when the ship "Swan" had been reported missing for several months that the household at the Stepping Stones changed those sober colours, which they had worn during the period of doubt and anxiety, for a dress of actual mourning.

This unexpected calamity was a terrible blow to Miss Leake; her outlook in life seemed to be suddenly taken from her; she had nothing further to arrange or to plan. The small domestic circle from which she sent out her forces into the social world lost its reason for existence, and her own position, in the background though it had

always been, was now deprived of its reality.

What she suffered during that time no one knew, for she carried a brave face before her little world, and spoke to her clergyman of resignation, and of chastening afflictions. Nevertheless it perplexed her that she should have been thus chosen as a subject for this sort of "dispensation." Had she not done her duty? was she not herself no despicable servant? and had she not carefully brought up her younger sisters as a credit both to society and religion? It was well for those households who stumbled stupidly on in a confusion of morals and a negligence of manners to be thus occasionally humiliated; but for her household, so decorous, so orderly, so dutiful, to be thus devastated was a thing beyond her comprehension. She was capable of arguing with Providence, after a manner not unknown to the ancient heroes of the Jews, and of asking if Divine justice was not held up to contempt by her own

unmerited chastisement, if the enemies of the good might not reasonably triumph at this undoing of all her plans. But the simplicity of the patriarchal time has long passed away; courage and conceit have adopted modified forms since Jacob made his imperious bargains, and David argumentatively put forward his own merits for his Creator's notice.

“Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth” was the text with which Miss Leake faced the world; but secretly she felt that, if this were love, she was just as well without it. Her sister Ellen ventured to suggest that perhaps they had been worldly, and this was a punishment; but Miss Leake scoffed at the idea, as insulting to Divine intelligence. She had done her duty and taken care of her family—no more than that; and if she had been mistaken, must her young sisters be sacrificed for her fault? Her sorrow was tinged with bitterness, but with no humility or regret; she looked merely with a little tinge of concealed con-

tempt upon her clergyman as an official of a system which neglected its duties and abandoned its servants in a manner calculated to bring disgrace on any worldly and fallible one! "They have been taken perhaps from the evil to come," the vicar remarked, using the comforting formula which had been provided for him to bring forward on such occasions, and Miss Leake answered, with grim politeness, "Very true."

They had been taken from the world where the higher powers broke their contracts as freely as the lower, and religion was a thing as shifting and uncertain as commerce. So she interpreted his comforting observation. Providence, she felt, was unreliable and constantly needing special explanation after the event; the survivors in a catastrophe generally extolled the wisdom of its selections, and the others could say nothing; but she, a sufferer on this occasion, perceived no wisdom and no design in its management. The trouble which had fallen upon her seemed to her the result of care-

lessness or indifference: she had a feeling as if some one had broken faith with her; but she was too proud, rather than too timid, to say so.

It was perhaps with renewed anguish and indignation that she read in the morning paper the startling announcement of the survival and rescue of some of the crew of the lost ship, and of two passengers, "Mr. and Mrs. Dilworth." Had any woman been saved, and not her sister? This was a hard and bitter thing indeed. Ellen was, on the other hand, softened and saddened. It was "mysterious," she pronounced, "wonderful;" and the more she failed to understand the Divine intentions, the more reverentially she endeavoured to conciliate them. If religion was not that institution for the encouragement of respectable families, and Providence that power delegated for their protection, which they appeared to her sister Susie to be, there was all the more reason to study their special requirements: frequent attendance

at early services, careful fulfilment of ordinances, and carrying out of genuflections, might after all be the true road to Divine favour.

The life of a courtier, who neglects essential service for ceremonial observances, may be followed also as a religious career, and Ellen began to devote herself to it.

But one morning, not long after that announcement had been seen in the newspapers, there lay on the table at the Stepping Stones a letter in a handwriting which Miss Leake had despaired of ever seeing again.

She looked at it as if it might be a messenger from another world, and she could hardly find courage to open it. She broke the cover at last, and turned at once to the signature. It was in the same well-known handwriting, and she read there:

“ Your loving sister,
“ AGNES DILWORTH.”

The light of a reasonable hope began to

grow in her mind, to flush her pale cheeks, and to tremble in her hands. She looked at the date and at the writing, at the enclosure in another handwriting, signed "Henry Dilworth," and she began to understand. For was not Dilworth the name of the passengers who had been announced as saved?

"Anna! Ellen!" she said, speaking to her sisters, "Agnes is alive; this is her letter." And when once she had said it, it became a real thing to her; she turned greedily back to the precious paper in her hand for further explanations.

"Dear Susie, dear Sisters,—I am alive; I am coming home. Do not ask me about Kate or Jack; they are drowned with the others. I should have been drowned too but for Mr. Dilworth; and I should have died afterwards but for him. He has saved me and taken care of me, and now he has married me and is bringing me home.

“ It well be good to see you all again, and the old place. I have been very ill. It was so dreadful on the island! I will tell you all about it some time. I am not well now, but Mr. Dilworth takes care of me. He said it was best for us to marry, and then he could bring me home. I never could have got back without him, I know; and oh, how nice it will be to be in Elmdale again! Mr. Dilworth is very good and very clever. You will like him: Jack did. There is so much to say that I cannot write any more. We are coming by the next ship: this is a poor one.

“ I send so very much love to you all. I know you never expected to see me again.

“ Your loving sister,
“ AGNES DILWORTH.”

The tears ran down Miss Leake’s cheeks as she read the incoherent epistle. “ Poor child! dear child!” she repeated to herself; and then with a pause of wonder—“ She is married!”

She took up Henry Dilworth's letter, and read that also :

“ **MADAM**,—Your sister has informed you of our marriage and of the reasons for it. I hope that they will not seem insufficient when you understand them fully. If she has not been able to consult her friends in the choice she has made, the strange circumstances which threw us together must be the explanation.

“ I beg you to believe that I would not have persuaded her to take any step which I considered contrary to her welfare; the desolate position in which she found herself made friendly protection, and the care of one who belonged to her, almost a necessity. It is my hope and desire to restore her safely to you. If I can do so, my action in connecting her life with mine will have its sufficient excuse.

“ I am, madam,

“ Very respectfully yours,

“ **HENRY DILWORTH.**”

This was the letter at which Agnes had arched her eyebrows in surprise ; and Miss Leake studied it now in doubt and perplexity.

“ It is very formal,” she said ; “ is it a *gentleman’s* letter ? ”

She repeated this question to her brother Robert when he came over to Elmdale, on the receipt of the happy news ; and he answered, “ It isn’t easy to say. Many men write letters quite unlike themselves. We must wait and see.”

“ Agnes is so ignorant of the world,” Miss Leake observed ; “ we cannot tell what he may be like. She doesn’t say what he is.”

“ It seems that we have to thank him for having her back at all. Agnes says he saved her life, and therefore I believe he did. Agnes has been brought up to expect a good deal from the world, and she isn’t given to exaggerating benefits conferred on her.”

“ Agnes is very affectionate, and full of feeling,” Miss Leake said.

“Yes, for those who do everything for her. If she is grateful to Mr. Dilworth, I think we may consider that we have reason to be grateful too; let us make objections only when we find we cannot help it.”

“That is quite true, and very wise,” Miss Leake observed; but she found her chief comfort in the careless remark of Agnes, “You will like him: Jack did.” She translated this simple phrase into a statement that Mr. Dilworth had been a friend of Mr. Langford’s, and she announced the supposed fact freely to her acquaintances. Mr. Dilworth was a fellow-passenger, a friend of her brother-in-law’s; he had saved her sister’s life, taken care of her, and married her. It was a romantic history. They were full of gratitude to Mr. Dilworth, and anxious to make his acquaintance. So she told all her friends, with the courage of necessity; and she tried to hope that facts would never contradict her apparent satisfaction. In her

inmost heart she felt that at least she would have Agnes back again, and she must make the best of any disappointing circumstances which she brought with her. Agnes had been more her child than any of the others ; she could not realize that any man should have a superior authority over her, much less a man to whom she had never voluntarily delegated her power. She must wait to see whether he was fit for the happy position which a strange fortune had bestowed on him.



CHAPTER VII.

IN THE OLD NEST.

THE first part of the voyage to England was a happy time for Henry Dilworth and his wife. Agnes was full of joy at the thought of seeing her home again, and yet she felt no impatience to reach it. The close attendance of her husband, and the kindness of all about her, made a satisfactory present, from which it was pleasant to look forward to a delightful future.

Henry Dilworth was regarded as somewhat of a hero by those around her, who knew the story of the wreck, and Agnes was proud of belonging to him—proud also of her power over him. Then she had the pleasure of perceiving that he actually looked up to her and deferred to her judgment in many particulars; and this was a novelty

to her. At this time they were, indeed, completely satisfied with each other and with their marriage. She perceived no faults in his manners, except such as she could laugh at, and he found nothing wanting in her affection for him.

But bad weather brought a return of illness, and Agnes landed in England in a weak condition. The railway journey was delayed for a couple of days to give her resting-time where they first went ashore; and when at last the travellers reached the station nearest to Elmdale, no one was there to meet them; an empty carriage only had been sent at Henry Dilworth's request, for he was anxious to save his wife from all excitement until she should be actually at home, where she could rest and recover her strength.

Her first entrance to the familiar valley was, therefore, made in his company alone; his hands clasped hers caressingly, and he watched the changes in her face instead of the scenes through which they drove. She

thought herself a happy woman to be returning in his care, and the pleasure of the moment was not spoilt by any doubt about his complete satisfactoriness.

As they drove along the lanes they met a couple of equestrians, who recognized Agnes as they passed by ; and the impression produced on these old acquaintances was in one respect just what Agnes expected.

“ That was Agnes Leake, I declare,” one of them said to the other, “ and her husband, I suppose. What a very handsome man ! I wonder *who* he is ? no one seems to know.”

But Agnes only imagined the admiration, not the suspicious curiosity.

When at last the Stepping Stones were reached, and Henry Dilworth carried his wife into the little drawing-room she knew so well, there was no thought on the part of those awaiting her of formal introduction, or of criticizing observation, with regard to the stranger who came as her husband. There was for a moment only a tumult of

welcome, of wonder, of incredulous delight, of pitying anxiety.

Agnes was kissed, caressed, and compassionated, while she clung to her husband's hand—her safeguard and refuge in this storm of excitement, as it had been in real dangers—and smiled at her sisters, and cried a little and laughed a good deal.

Then her husband interfered with quiet authority, and begged that she might go to her own room and rest. Miss Leake looked at him with a desire to be just, and a conscientious anxiety not to feel unfriendly. It was hard to recognize at this moment his superior claim on her darling, to acknowledge that he could give the best help and had the best right to give it.

But she yielded without hesitation. It was evident that Agnes had learned to rely upon him, and that she was happy in his care. Therefore Miss Leake carried out his suggestions with that self-effacing obedience which is characteristic of competency when it waives its authority for a

time. She had expected that her own personal attendance would be required by the invalid, she could nurse her sister so much better than Mr. Dilworth, "a man," as she would have contemptuously said; but Agnes had so long been dependent upon her husband for every sort of care, that it was evident he could best give it to her now. Any alteration in her habits would be disturbing and exciting; her husband's presence seemed necessary to her rest; the sound of his voice seemed to impel her to quietness and obedience.

So, for the first time in her life, Miss Leake found herself shut out of her sister's sick room, for the first time knew that her presence was not necessary, was actually troublesome; she was compelled to perceive that some one else more than filled her place, and was helpful to Agnes in a degree which she had never reached.

She said to herself with some impatience that it was the extravagant affection of newly-married people which made the

difference, and she waited for her turn to come again, waited and watched ready for her opportunity. She did not know that there was something in the larger and more generous nature of Henry Dilworth which was at the same time scathing and inspiriting to his wife. Agnes did not understand it herself, but through her husband's mind she had glimpses of the world and of life from a higher point of view than had been open to her in the household at the Stepping Stones. She perceived dimly that her husband's goodness to her did not arise from her own intrinsic importance, but from his large generosity. It seemed possible at this time that her love of him might lift her easily into a higher atmosphere: and that her disposition to yield quietly to protective influences, and to take the tone of those around her, might lead her gently and unconsciously into a state of mind prepared for satisfaction with the life that he could give her.

But Miss Leake waited, like one who has

yielded a property reluctantly, and who is ready to find a flaw in the title-deeds of the possessor. She made no foolish and futile protests, but she could not believe in the permanency of her compulsory abdication. It seemed at this moment too complete to be natural. The marriage she had dreamt of for Agnes was not of this class. The husband she had imagined for her sister would have given to his wife an occupation and social importance, and he would have been master (of course) in his own house ; but he would not have supplanted her in that sister's heart. Agnes would have still come to her for help and advice in the multitude of departments with which a man has nothing to do ; she might even have demanded her sympathy in troubles which a man cannot understand. But this marriage seemed to shut her altogether out of her sister's life : Agnes looked at her, laughing, from the gates of Paradise, then closed the door and went inside.

And was not this Paradise possibly vulgar, and a mistake ? Had not her own

influence gone because it was incompatible with the influence of Henry Dilworth? Had he not absorbed her share in the life of Agnes because the young wife's confidential trust could not be divided between her husband and her sister, because they belonged to different classes, and could not reign in the same sphere or the same life?

The impression produced on the family circle by Henry Dilworth in the first hurried interview was that of a handsome man, with quiet manners, rather oddly dressed. But that might be explained by the absence of opportunity for getting good clothes after the shipwreck. He had been evidently absorbed in anxiety about his wife, and had thought of no one else at the moment. This was a point in his favour, but it had prevented the occurrence of opportunities for criticism.

“Poor child! how ill she looks!” was the first natural exclamation of the sisters, when the Dilworths had disappeared into their own room.

Then some one said suggestively, "A very fine-looking man!"

"I like his manner very much," said Robert Leake with decision.

"Nothing could be kinder or more considerate," said Miss Leake with a little sigh.

When Henry Dilworth came out of his wife's room he found his sister-in-law hovering anxiously and silently about the landing.

"She is asleep now," he said in a low voice; "perhaps you would like to go in and sit with her? I thought of turning out for a stroll if you would."

"I shall be very glad; but you must have some lunch."

"I would rather not; I want nothing. Just a turn or two outside before she wakes and then I'll come back."

"Then my brother will go with you; he is waiting downstairs to see you."

Miss Leake felt perhaps some desire that the family should not give up all charge

of this new member of it until they had discovered what manner of man he might be. She was anxious to be politely attentive, and anxious also to join her young sister; therefore she was glad to hand Henry Dilworth over to the care of her brother. Her pretty little hall and old-fashioned staircase looked dwarfed in the presence of this man from the colonies, whose easy movements as well as his massive limbs gave an impression of outdoor life. They were not without training certainly, but it was not a training which qualified him to feel at home in an elegantly furnished cottage residence, where maiden ladies lead an existence of modest but luxurious refinement.

Miss Leake felt that she would not quite know what to do with this brother-in-law of hers. There was a difference between them, undoubtedly; but it was not yet obvious who had the advantage in this difference.

Henry Dilworth had already received an

impression of being shut up in a gilded cage. The elaborateness of the decorations and the abundance of ornament in the low but pretty rooms subdued him with a sense of the necessity of very measured and careful movement. Also the presence of so many persons in a space already well occupied by the furniture, their eager attentions, the lavish caresses they had bestowed on Agnes, all so full of feeling, and yet under the control of some law which he did not quite understand, gave him the idea of being in a new world, where his standard of manners must be readjusted. He wanted to get out into the fresh air, to stretch his limbs and expand his thoughts under the free and universal heaven.

But he was not so to escape. The privilege of belonging to such a household as Miss Leake's could not be held with impunity. He had not learnt the passwords which would have given him freedom of action in society, and he must

consequently be contented to be held in close bondage.

Robert Leake, his wife's eldest brother, was waiting for him downstairs; not, indeed, with any idea of being a constraint upon him, but only wishing to show him politeness, and to learn something of himself and his position.

"Are you going out for a stroll?" he said. "I will go with you."

They walked along the road together, and for a time neither spoke. Henry Dilworth had nothing to say: he was inclined to be quiet and to take in new impressions.

Robert Leake asked him a few questions concerning the day's journey, which he answered briefly and to the point.

When they reached a curve of the road and turned back towards the house (with a mutual feeling that they must be within call), Henry Dilworth looked at the river and the road with the cottage nestling back among the trees against the hillside, and said, "She has often described it to me."

It was the first spontaneous utterance of his own impressions he had made since his arrival, and Robert Leake looked at him with polite curiosity.

“She was always a home-bird. We must be grateful to you for bringing her back to the nest. She tells us that you did everything for her,” he remarked.

“It was nothing. I could do no less.”

“You saved her life, however. There is no doubt about that, I suppose?” and then he hesitated. “We were all surprised to hear of her marriage.”

Henry Dilworth’s countenance changed at once from quiet contemplation to active attention.

“It was a difficult question to decide,” he said; “she was absolutely alone, and very ill. I hope you will none of you feel that she was sacrificed.”

“We have certainly no reason to think so,” her brother answered cordially.

“There was no alternative of waiting and consulting her friends. If that had

been possible the marriage itself would have seemed out of the question. She wanted help and care *then*."

"I don't quite understand. You mean that you married her——"

"That I might be able to take care of her."

"And for yourself, on your own account, you would not have thought of it?"

Henry Dilworth's face flushed, and he met the half-withdrawn glance of the other with a full look.

"No, I should never have thought of it. I do not mean that your sister was not lovable. But I should not have presumed to love her, or at least to find out that I did."

"I understand, perfectly. You tried to decide according to *her* interest?"

"I tried to do it. I hope you will none of you think that I made a mistake. I see that there is a difference between us. Such differences never concerned me before. My life has had little to do with them. I have

attended to my work and not troubled about other things. But I see that there is a difference, and I remember now that her sister thought so. I did not notice it at the time—there was no need."

"Her sister—Kate?"

"Yes; Mrs. Langford."

"Kate was young, poor girl, and full of fancies. And Jack Langford?"

"He was a very good friend of mine. I promised him to take care of his sister-in-law, just before the wreck took place, when it seemed probable."

Mr. Leake was silent for a time, meditating. At last he said :

"I should like to understand your feeling clearly. You mean that you are not of our class?"

"My mother was a servant-girl before she married my father. He was a blacksmith."

"You say *was*. Then they are not alive?"

"No. I haven't any relations to introduce

to my wife whom you wouldn't like her to know. I am alone in the world."

"Then, my dear fellow," said Mr. Leake cheerfully, "I don't see that it matters what you were so long as she is satisfied with what you are. She is only a girl, as Kate was, and full of fancies; so that she mightn't have liked——In short, if you had had relatives not equal to yourself in education, and so on, they mightn't have pulled together. But things are straightforward enough now. Money matters are comparatively easy to settle; they can always be arranged when a man has capacity. I am not anxious about that. We shall find something in time."

"Do you mean that you suppose I am poor, or that I have no employment?"

"I don't know, of course. But there's my sister's little fortune—not much, but enough to secure comfort to her for her lifetime. That would have been settled upon her in case of an ordinary marriage.

I was thinking that perhaps you will consent for it to be done now?"

"By all means," Henry Dilworth answered quickly. "I didn't know that she had anything; she never told me. I should like to add something to it—whatever you think necessary," he went on, with a flushed face. "I am not poor; I have had more than I needed for many years, and money grows. I don't want it myself, except that I should like to keep a thousand, or perhaps two, in reserve, to carry out some ideas, if necessary. But I could find from eight to ten thousand and do that still, without touching the sheep-farm. I must explain to you the investments."

"I appreciate your generosity," said Mr. Leake warmly, and wondering more than ever at the unexpected sort of husband which his sweet young sister had brought home with her. "My sister's fortune is something like three hundred a year; if you could make that into five or six, we should feel that she was satisfactorily provided for."

They had approached the garden gate, and perceived the anxious face of Miss Leake looking out for them.

“Agnes is awake, and asking for you,” she said almost reproachfully; and Henry Dilworth went at once to his wife.



CHAPTER VIII.

D R I F T I N G A S U N D E R .

FOR the first few days the condition of Agnes was such as to fill her friends with anxiety, and to demand the closest attention of her husband. If she awoke in his absence a bewildered look came into her face, and she broke into tears of vague alarm and distress. She had learned so completely to cling to him and rely on him in troubles past, that she never felt safe when he was out of her sight.

Under these circumstances her family could regard him only with grateful consideration. His love was the link that seemed to keep this frail life still among them; no one else knew how to soothe the invalid to rest, or to cheer her to animation. Yet, as he came and went in the little

household, it was evident to the member of it that he was, though among them, not of them.

The disorganized state of the usually regular establishment permitted this fact to be ignored for a time, though it might bring embarrassment afterwards. All formal visiting was given up; no one expected to be invited to meet the newly-married couple, and introductions to the husband only occurred casually.

Even the neat little dinners, which Miss Leake loved to preside over at seven o'clock, were permitted to fall into abeyance, or at least Henry Dilworth's attendance at them was not exacted. It was reasonable that he should take his meals with his wife if he preferred and she demanded it: and so the most formal ceremonial of the day was avoided. Also it was natural that he should wish to escape into the open air from the atmosphere of the sick room whenever his wife did not need his presence; and so it came

to pass that he was not compelled to spend many hours in the pretty drawing-room, where the lounges and easy-chairs were a discomfort to him, and the nick-nacks a perplexity. For too much comfort was a discomfort, too much luxury a trouble to a man of his simple habits. He had not learned to use delicate appliances with unconscious care, and felt himself rough and out of place amid the carved chair legs and embroidered covers.

Mr. Leake went in and out among these things without thought and without disaster; they were an anxiety to his brother-in-law, and yet did not altogether escape damage at his hands or from his feet.

“Those dreadful boots!” Miss Leake observed with a sigh. “Agnes must really tell him to get lighter ones.”

Although Henry Dilworth was so conscious of the dainty brightness of all things around him, he did not observe the havoc made therein by his own carelessness.

He was not untidy, but he was accustomed to work with few materials, and to have these always at hand. He had never kept the working part of life in the background in favour of the ornamental and recreational, and his personal possessions, few as they were, were not of a most elegant sort.

Miss Leake was detected by her brother gazing in melancholy fashion at a very rough overcoat, a clumsy umbrella, and a rude sort of fishing-basket, which encumbered the furniture of the hall.

“We have Agnes back again,” said Robert Leake with a smile, “but she has brought a few trials with her.”

“This is such a small house,” sighed Miss Leake, “and we have to be so particular about what we keep in it, if it is to look nice. If the place were larger it would not matter so much.”

Henry Dilworth very soon took a hint that was given to him not to smoke all over the house, and retired with his pipe to the diminutive library or breakfast-room,

where he pored over some volumes which he had sent for from London. Even this use of the least important sitting-room was a concession on the part of Miss Leake. Her brothers were not great smokers, and willingly took their cigars out of doors when staying at the Stepping Stones.

Agnes knew this well, and when she found her husband studying prints of birds with a strong smell of tobacco in the air, she expressed her amazement.

“ You *must* be in favour with Susie, if she lets you smoke here,” she said. “ Robert and Charlie always have to go out with their cigars.”

“ I won’t do it again,” said Henry Dilworth. “ I am glad you told me.”

But when Miss Leake found that he had been spoken to on the subject, she remonstrated with her sister.

“ We must do nothing that will interfere with his comfort and make him feel that he is not at home here,” she said conscientiously.

Agnes recovered by degrees, and was able after a time to take something like her old place in the household; then a new consciousness awoke in her. She was aware at first of a lack of the old ease and comfort in the domestic relations at the Stepping Stones; there was in the atmosphere a certain dissatisfaction and criticism, which had not existed before she left home; it took her some time to understand that there was something in the manners of her husband not quite congenial to her sisters, that there was something in the life he led not quite congenial to himself, but as soon as she understood she tried to put the whole matter right.

She began by suggesting to him various little alterations. "Why don't you do so and so?" or, "Didn't you know that you ought to have acted in such a way?"

He tried to please her, but the result was a failure; and she began to look wistfully at her sisters, and to say of him apologetically, "He is so clever and so good,

but he has not been used to this sort of life."

So she fell away from her first grateful admiration of him; and such a falling away could only be the beginning of a disastrous end.

Robert Leake had been favourably impressed by his brother-in-law, and had spoken well of him to Miss Leake after their first interview, when she anxiously asked his opinion.

"I think him a very fine fellow; and I think Agnes may be a happy woman if she knows how to appreciate him and make the best of him; but I doubt whether she's got it in her, in which case I'm sorry for both."

"I am sure Agnes will make a good wife," Miss Leake protested; "she is most affectionate and docile."

"Yes, when things are to her liking. Oh, you need not tell me that she's a good girl, according to her lights; but I doubt whether she understands the sort of man she's married."

“ Why should she understand? I don’t see that it’s desirable for her to enter into the kind of life he may have led.”

“ When married people don’t understand one another, there has to be a sacrifice somewhere, you know.”

Miss Leake did not deny this. She was only determined that the sacrifice should not be on the side of Agnes. She said as much.

“ Well, it’s not my affair,” said her brother. “ He’s old enough to look after himself, and he’s walked into the difficulty with his eyes open. It’s my opinion that he knew what he was doing better than she did, and that he’s prepared to go through with it.”

“ Of course; he ought to be.”

“ Ah, but Agnes, you know, isn’t. She never did, and she never will do, anything to make herself seriously uncomfortable.”

“ It wouldn’t be right to ask her,” said Susie indignantly.

Robert Leake only lifted his eyebrows, and wondered whether the life of this strong and original man must for ever be stranded in the shallow waters of his pretty sister's chosen pool of existence. But it was not, as he said, his affair ; he had only to look after his sister's pecuniary interests and to leave the rest to shape itself. Nevertheless, when he got some idea of how circumstances were progressing, in a later visit to the Stepping Stones, he remonstrated with Susie.

“ You’re all making a mistake,” he said ; “ you must take him as he is, and you will perhaps find him something to be proud of after all. But you’ll never make a fine gentleman of him.”

“ We don’t wish to do,” Miss Leake replied with dignity ; “ but a little conformity to social usages is surely necessary.”

“ I wouldn’t keep him here. The life’s not fit for him. He wants a bigger world to move in. The people here are too small, too provincial, not intelligent enough to do

him justice. They see only his bad manners."

"Not intelligent enough! too provincial!" Miss Leake repeated, and did not attempt to say more.

Robert Leake, however, gave his brother-in-law a hint that he might take his wife to the seaside to aid her convalescence. And his idea was seized with eagerness by Henry Dilworth. When it was first mentioned to Agnes, it seemed to please her also. But, afterwards, when she had spoken on the subject to Miss Leake, her tone changed altogether.

"Susie says we ought not to think of it. I might be taken ill again. I ought not to leave home."

"Is this your home, dear child?" he asked, looking into her eyes.

It was the first time that he had asked such a question, and her face flushed.

"I have no other," she said.

"I must make you one," was his answer. For the Stepping Stones, if a home to

her, was none to him ; and his active spirit was beginning to fret against the restraints put upon it there, although he led his own life as much as he could. The companionship of his wife was gradually being taken from him, his influence over her gradually declined, and he spent more and more of his time in the open air—fishing, walking, exploring the country. He became a well-known figure in the district, and was as much at home among the hills as he was a stranger in the drawing-rooms of Elmdale.

He had been induced to go to one dinner party—sorely against his will—because Agnes had desired it.

“They will be offended; they won’t understand if you refuse. Oh, you *must* go,” she had said, with such earnestness that he yielded.

His compliance brought little satisfaction to any one ; and he could never be induced to repeat the experiment. Even Miss Leake hardly desired that he should. She began to describe him to her friends as eccentric ;

very clever, indeed, but like no one else, and wholly given up to scientific pursuits.

Agnes still clung to the hope that he might be mitigated and moderated into something more presentable. She began to take Miss Leake's view, that a good husband is not entirely good unless he seems so to the world. She tried still to introduce little alterations into his habits and dress; and it was by the light of her loving anxiety that her sister's disapproval was revealed to Henry Dilworth.

"I don't see *why* you shouldn't be just like other people," she said desperately at last; "you are so clever, and they are so silly; it must be *easy* to do like them."

"Is it advisable?" he said smiling. "You haven't put it temptingly."

"But you know what I mean; you are too clever not to do," she said petulantly.

"I am afraid I do, dear," he answered, taking her hands gently, and looking into her face. "I am afraid you mean that you are a little ashamed of me."

“Oh, Henry, no ; not that. Why *should* I be? You are better than any of them. But they don’t understand, and I want them to.”

“Isn’t it enough if *you* understand? Can’t we live our lives and never mind them?”

“But this is *my* life,” upon which he let her hands go and turned away.

Gradually her reliance upon him, her submission to his judgment, had been slipping away. Her sisters had, very gradually and unobtrusively, taken their old place with her, and cured her of that absolute dependence on her husband which had made the basis of her love and marriage.

Susie was always anxious to save Mr. Dilworth “trouble,” to take the care of his wife off his hands, and to leave him free for other occupations. Her kindness was a gradual usurpation, and yet was so cleverly masked, that Henry Dilworth himself scarcely knew what she was doing until the thing was done.

... Then he discovered that his wife had hardly any more need of him ; that her life was complete without him, and that, indeed, there was little room left for him in it. Her sisters had, with mistaken kindness, taught her to appreciate his merits all over again on a new foundation ; and her old estimate of him seemed to be changed for another and very different one.

“He is so original,” they would say. “Of course a man like that must follow his own pursuits. It wouldn’t be right for you to expect him to be a great deal with you. It would be a waste of talent.”

So Agnes was tutored gradually to let him alone, and to go back to her old amusements without him. She drove out with her sisters ; she made and received visits ; and hardly wondered at her husband’s more frequent absences and increasing abstraction in her presence. It was Miss Leake who made kindly efforts to be interested in his occupations, and who encouraged Agnes to bestow some attention

on the results—a thing the young wife would not have dreamt of doing for herself.

Miss Leake asked questions about the plants, butterflies, and geological specimens he discovered in his rambles, and declared that it was wonderfully interesting to hear of them. She turned them over in her fingers, pointed out to Agnes imaginary peculiarities, ignored really valuable qualities, and apologized for the insignificance of the most valuable specimens.

“Oh yes, you’ll find a better than that, I dare say, if you go to the same place again; you won’t throw it away, of course, till you do,” she said of a unique example, concerning which he intended to write to a learned correspondent.

Agnes tried to be interested in these things, as Susie told her to be, but she could not manage it.

“They are very ugly, are they not?” she asked. “I suppose no one would care about them if they had not such long names?”

On the whole, Henry Dilworth preferred her old blank indifference; it had been pleasanter than this sympathy of effort and ignorance.

At last he said to her that he must go back to Australia soon, if only for a short time, to arrange his affairs. Would she like to go with him? She seemed surprised, doubtful, and melancholy. Finally she said that she would "ask Susie."

"Must we not decide these things for ourselves now?" he demanded gently. "When people are married they need only consult each other."

"But I don't know what I should like," Agnes objected.

"And Susie will tell you?" he answered.

"Why shouldn't she tell me if she knows?"

"Don't I know just as well? Are my wishes and my opinions nothing to you?"

"Your *wishes* are, of course. But you never would wish me to do what would

make me ill; and your opinion isn't so good as Susie's—about me, I mean. She knows just what I can do."

He said no more; the force of his will was as nothing before these persistent waves of gentle selfishness, which seemed to yield sometimes, but always returned to what they were before.

He asked her once if she would like to settle in England, and she brightened at the idea.

"There is such a pretty house to let in Long Valley, only a mile and a half away," she said at once; "we might take that."

"I am afraid not. It is a villa residence and no more. There would be nothing for me to do there."

"You find enough to do now, don't you? and it would be just the same."

The smile with which he answered her was destitute of cheerfulness.

"Do you think this is a life for a man?" he asked.

“I don’t know what you want. What *should* you do?”

“I might take a farm in an agricultural county, and work that; you would be near enough to visit your sisters occasionally; and we should be happy together, should we not? I see so little of you now, Agnes.”

“You could see more of me if you liked,” she objected, “but you will never go out with me when I pay visits; and you know I can’t walk far. I don’t see why you should want to take me away from my friends.”

“Could we not be happy alone together, dear child?”

“You *might*, because you don’t like society; but I have always been used to it; and as for a *farm*, the idea is dreadful. I could never hear of it. If you must go away from Elmdale, where I have always been so happy, it would be best to go to London. Robert says you might get an appointment of some sort, he thinks.”

“Of what sort?”

“Oh, I don’t know, but *he* does. He thinks you are clever enough, and he says that people in London are not so narrow as people in the country. They would not be so stupid; they would appreciate you more, and we might go into society together.”

He spoke no more of settling in England after that. He put the future away from his thoughts, and arranged only for the immediate present.

Miss Leake, on the other hand, talked quite cheerfully of his return to Australia and to scientific explorations.

“It will be a trial to Agnes to lose you,” she id, “but sait is her duty to bear that. No good wife would be selfish enough to keep you from such pursuits. I wish the dear girl were strong enough to go with you; but we must take care of her in your absence.”

Henry Dilworth occupied himself in his preparations. He had been quieter and

more taciturn since that last discussion with his wife ; all his hopes of a return to their happy old relations had been based on a departure from Elmdale. For the sake of Agnes he had been willing to change his mode of life, and to settle quietly in her own country ; but it was evident that no sacrifice was sufficient which did not involve destruction of his self-respect as well as ambition. Therefore he gave up hoping for the home he had dreamt of in the first week of his married life.

Sorrow had visited him beforetimes, and hardships often ; neither had quelled his hopeful spirit. Now, for the first time in his life, the bitterness of personal hope disappointed and affection slighted entered into his soul and saddened it. The armour of his simplicity and straightforward purpose had protected him hitherto from slight and humiliation ; he had removed the defence in the ardour of his love for Agnes, and he found himself wounded by

the hand which he had permitted to disarm him.

And Agnes herself was not satisfied, though she had chosen to throw in her lot with her sisters and to forsake her husband.

As the time for his departure approached her interest in visits and amusements declined. She followed him about with a wistful look in her eyes, and was indifferent to the attractions of Susie's cheerful conversation. She would sit down and watch him sometimes as he wrote letters or turned over his portfolios and cases; and he was conscious of her presence, but the time had gone by when they could fall into easy conversation together, or share their thoughts and anxieties without difficulty.

She was even fretful, and anxious, as it were, for some one to find out her unhappiness and comment upon it; but no one did her the latter service.

“Poor child! we must keep her spirits up

as much as we can until you are gone," Miss Leake said to Henry Dilworth; "then she will get over her trouble."

Susie's cordiality and kindness to her brother-in-law at this time were wonderful to see. She had fought a battle in which she believed herself victorious, but she was anxious to persuade her opponent that there had been no struggle at all. She acted as if the household at the Stepping Stones was all that she represented it to her friends—a sympathetic and harmonious family, where each member appreciated the others and every step taken by any one was warmly applauded by all.

"Agnes is going nowhere at present," she explained; "she gives all her time to her husband. They are devoted to one another. But of course he must go back to carry on his discoveries in Australia. It is only the illness of Agnes that could have kept him here so long. His life is a perfect sacrifice to science. Isn't it strange

that he should care for a simple little creature like Agnes? For she never was clever, you know, like Kate." (Kate's talents, by-the-bye, had grown largely in her sister's estimation since her death.) "But it often is so with very clever men: they admire young girls who are simply sweet and intelligent."

"And pretty," her hearer suggested.

"Yes, I suppose she is pretty; people often tell me so; but when you know her other good qualities so well, you don't think of that. There never was a more gentle, affectionate, tractable creature anywhere."

Nevertheless this sweet creature sometimes looked at her sister with eyes in which reproach mingled with appeal. She was not satisfied or happy; but she did not know how to express her wants, she did not even know what she wanted; she waited for Susie to tell her, and Susie kept silence discreetly.

Henry Dilworth, meanwhile, felt that

she had slipped out of his life altogether. She was very caressing, almost anxiously affectionate at this time; but she had no hopes or plans in common with him. Sometimes, when he met her wistful and troubled look, he felt inclined to take her in his arms and beg her to follow him through the world, and trust to his care and love for her happiness and comfort. But he never did it; a sense of the weakness of will which lay beneath all her tenderness of feeling subdued him to silence. Perhaps, if he had yielded to this impulse, the tenderness would have prevailed for a time, and she would have gone with him; but discontent and reproach might have followed, to break down and embitter their love more effectually than a long separation.

When the day of parting came, the young wife's white face was a sight sad enough to damp even Miss Leake's persistent cheerfulness. The poor girl looked at her sisters with a dumb protest against

their failure to solve the problem of her life with less pain to herself. She looked at her husband with imploring tenderness, as if she entreated him to forgive her for sending him away alone. He had accepted the position, and had no words to throw away upon it. Besides, his hurt was too deep to bear meddling with. She had slipped from his life, as if his love had no hold upon her, and he could not endure to utter a reproach or express a regret.

When he gave her his parting kiss she clung to him in a silence more passionate than words. It seemed as if, now the moment had come, she was utterly unprepared for it, and could not bear to let him go. He loosed her arms gently from his neck, kissed her again, looked into her eyes, and was gone.

Then she threw herself on the couch in an abandonment of grief, and refused to be comforted.

“No, no,” she said to her anxious

sisters; "do not speak to me. You do not care. You do not understand. You never liked him, and he is better than any of us. Why didn't I go with him? Why didn't you send me? I shall never be happy here—never. I ought to have gone. Why didn't Susie tell me to go?"

"Poor child! poor dear child!" said Susie sympathetically; "she will get over it presently."



CHAPTER IX.

SEPARATED.

AGNES did get over it, certainly, in the way her sisters had expected. She recovered her cheerfulness and a certain measure of health, and she was permitted by those around her to be occasionally fretful, and even unreasonable, in consideration of the trying circumstances in which she was placed.

She was made more of a pet than ever, as one who had an afflicting story belonging to her, and who might be considered somewhat of a heroine on the strength of it. But the atmosphere in which she lived was not bracing ; the encouragement which she received in her self-pity and self-indulgence gave little hope of a return to robust life. It was not wonderful, then,

that she never completely recovered her health, nor even that very moderate degree of mental vigour which had once been hers. She had always intended to be happy, and to behave well, according to her limited ideas; and this intention had given some spring and elasticity to her thoughts, even when she was most submissive to Susie. It had contributed also not a little—as youthful hopefulness does—to her activity of limb and alertness of interest in events outside her own life.

Now she knew distinctly that she was not happy; she had possessed something which she would miss daily and always, and she was not willing to pay the needful price for its recovery. Also she knew perfectly, amid those deeper and unspoken regrets over which a veil of trivial troubles was discreetly drawn, that she was not behaving well to the man to whom she owed so much, and who had never, even for a moment, acted towards her with selfishness.

As she could not alter her conduct satisfactorily without suffering, and as she did not want to suffer, her foundation for belief in herself and hope in the future was gone. It was easiest to look on herself as an invalid, to regard the circumstances of life as too strong for her and, since she could not be happy, to be at least as comfortable as she could.

Therefore she accepted the mitigations offered to her by fate, and was content to be ailing and somewhat dull. Too much energy or intelligence might have spurred her to an effort which she dreaded to make, and she was encouraged by her sisters to avoid those dangerous qualities. Everything would be forgiven her except a spirit of enterprise. Whatever she did badly or failed to do was attributed to her ill-health. If she was idle, it was supposed that she did not feel well enough to work; if she was fretful or petulant, it was supposed that she was thinking over her sad experiences. Every duty was taken from

her, and she was encouraged to rest or amuse herself as she felt disposed. She was caressed, consoled, and indulged in everything except the one secret wish of her heart, and that wish she perhaps never acknowledged to herself after the first anguish of separation was over.

Her old friends welcomed her back among them. They said that she was sweeter than ever—more interesting; but they made little capital out of her adventures. She could not bear to talk of them; she shuddered when they were referred to, but she brightened into animation when her husband was mentioned. Yet even on this subject her readiness to give information was small; Mr. Dilworth was wonderfully good and clever, and that was all she could find to say.

If any one remarked politely that she must miss him very much, she acquiesced; but would add with a sigh, “Susie says that even if I were strong enough to join

him in Australia, I should only interfere with his work there."

So she fell back into the old life, with its old pleasures, and old monotony; she looked forward to letters from her husband; with that exception it began to be as if she had never married at all.

But this period, when forgetfulness and a return to her girlish days seemed possible, was not to last long. She had taken a step which must change her whole life, and, however much she might avoid its consequences and shirk its responsibilities, the new days would not fit on to the old as if there had been no gap between.

A new life began at the Stepping Stones in the spring of the year, a little life innocent of wrong, and ignorant of all the perplexity about it; and the day came when Agnes Dilworth, holding her baby in her arms, looked at her sisters and wondered if they would not say that *now* she ought to join her husband.

They said nothing of the sort. They

assured her, on the contrary, that it was her duty to remain in England for the sake of her little daughter.

The child had been named Henrietta Kate, after the husband Agnes loved and the sister she had lost. Miss Leake would have objected to the first name, as awkwardly long and vulgarly fine, but she was afraid to object to anything at the moment, lest her own influence should slip away before the new power of maternity.

Under the changed condition of things, Henry Dilworth could be even less ignored and forgotten than before; it was natural, unavoidable even, that his wife should think of him and talk of him a great deal. Yet it seemed to Miss Leake more important than ever that Agnes should be prevented from sacrificing her life to his, because the whole future of this little niece (whom Miss Leake received at once into her affectionate care, though she was not fond of babies) depended on the associations of her infancy and the education of her youth.

She tried to impress this fact on Agnes. She even persuaded her that Henry Dilworth himself would wish his daughter to lose none of the advantages secured by a residence in Elmdale.

“Many mothers bring their children home to be educated, and here you are comfortably settled already,” she observed, “and everything as it should be. It must be a great satisfaction to Mr. Dilworth to know that you and the baby are so well cared for while he is obliged to be absent on these explorations.”

Every occupation in Australia, even sheep-farming, was an “exploration” to Miss Leake at this period.

Poor Agnes had been inclined to think, in the new yearning of her heart over this little child, that her baby’s interests turned the scale of duty the other way, and that no daughter could be better for missing a father’s love. Also she had fancied—foolishly, of course, since Susie thought otherwise—that Henry Dilworth had a

right to this child, besides having a stronger right than ever to the child's mother.

She knew that he liked all children—how tender he had been to that poor stupid boy on the island!—she knew how he had loved *her*; and sometimes faintly it dawned upon her what a sad disappointment his marriage must have been to him; he had been made use of to the utmost, at a time of need, and sent away with scanty thanks when the need was over. A faint desire to “behave better” to him was in her mind, a dim fancy that perhaps this child was sent to her husband as a compensation for her own weakness and a recompense for his love.

But she shrank from effort and inconvenience; she disliked deciding for herself, and preferred that others should tell her what to do. She could not endure a struggle against the will of those around her, unless forced to it by unpleasant sensations or the fear of them. So she let the

time drift by without seizing this opportunity to reassert her freedom of will, without making any advance to her husband or appeal to him.

He waited for it, and hoped for it. The thought of a home, with Agnes as its mistress and a little child as its delight, was very pleasant to him; but he made no claim in spite of this. If Agnes was not willing to come to him, and had no desire to send for him, if she was not content to live with him in any way possible to his nature, he was determined to force her to no effort of self-denial. His was the strength, and with him should rest the disappointment of this marriage, if disappointment there must be. He had entered into it for her sake, and for her sake he would relinquish every right it gave. At least his work was left to him, and in that he found solace and hope.

But it could not be as if he had never married her, or as if he had no wife and no child living far away; his thoughts went

to them often across the deserts and the lonely sea; and the dull continual aching of yearnings unsatisfied brought an unspoken sadness into his life.

Gradually he came to understand that Miss Leake was—consciously or unconsciously—scheming to protect his wife and child from the injury which his presence would do to them. He comprehended that she regarded his absence as essential to their welfare and happiness, and that, through all her forms of polite regret at his separation from his family, she was perpetually appealing to him not to return.

No word from Agnes contradicted this appeal, or he would have altogether ignored it. His wife had ceased to write of any near reunion as probable; she seemed to have settled back into old habits, and to have no thought of change. Therefore he let the time go by; and though sad enough at heart to think that the only service he could do to these he loved best was to keep far from their sight, he made no out-

ward complaint or protest. Miss Leake always said that he was absorbed in his pursuits, and that it would be wrong to interfere with him. Agnes seemed to believe her.

So that, after all, Agnes gained little freedom by her motherhood. She had not the strength of will to make the most of any position in which she was not properly supported; and her delicate health always gave her sisters a plea for interfering with any plans that were too vigorous. It also permitted them to ignore apparent discontent, or to attribute it to physical causes. If Agnes seemed restless, they said she wanted a change; if she was low-spirited, they said she was fatigued, and must keep very quiet; if they found her in tears, they soothed her, and brought her a cup of tea. On every occasion they persuaded her that her melancholy arose from physical causes, and not from an unsatisfied heart.

Even the child came to be regarded as little more than a plaything so far as she

was concerned. ... When she was well enough she was permitted to amuse herself with it, but it was instantly taken from her as soon as she appeared tired. She was not supposed to be strong enough to take the management of the infant, and Miss Leake was the actual authority who arranged the baby's affairs, as she arranged everything else within her reach.

She had so great a dread of Henry Dilworth's interference with his child's education, so great a fear of his return before that education was finished, that, contrary to her own general principles, she began a system of teaching ridiculously early, and engaged a French nurse to take care of Kate when the child was only three years of age.

Consequently, at five years old, Henry Dilworth's daughter spoke a smattering of a tongue wholly unknown to her father, was full of the caprices of a spoilt little lady—convinced of her own importance and of the vulgarity of the general world—

and was altogether as different a creature as well could be from what her father would have made her. She had been encouraged in the cultivation of an exclusiveness which she did not understand; for Miss Leake's exaggerated dread of any development of vulgar tastes in the child had led her to check every innocent tendency to that affability which she had thought it safe to cultivate in her own more happily placed sisters.

Under these circumstances little Kate soon learned to be wilful and imperious, to regard with more or less contempt every one who was not admitted to the sanctuary of her aunt's drawing-room, and to indulge her own feelings at the cost of any stranger whom she judged to be of an inferior type—one that did not come up to the all-sufficient drawing-room standard. When she was four years old a courageous plumber ventured to address a remark to her uninvited. He was mending the window of her nursery, and he thought that his

superiority of age entitled him to be friendly and conversational. But the little lady soon put him in his right place. She drew herself up to her full height, clutched her doll tightly and protectingly in her arms, and replied, with more haughtiness than grammar: "How dare you speak to such people as *us*?"

Meanwhile, with every healthful stimulus to exertion removed, with every unselfish interest taken from her, it was not wonderful that the health of Agnes gradually deteriorated. Nor was it strange that, in the invalid's life she was encouraged to lead, the final failure of her strength should escape observation for some time after it had begun. The unsatisfactory and anomalous position which she occupied preyed upon her spirits more and more as she left behind her the easy docility as well as the inconsequent light-heartedness of girlhood.

A mother with little authority over her child, a wife who never saw her husband

and who had never presided over any household—there was something unreal and dispiriting about her life. She had grown used to it, however; any change which could come now would be as much a trial as a relief; she felt that circumstances were hopelessly wrong, and that nothing could be done to better them. She said to herself that perhaps it was true, as Susie evidently thought, that her marriage had been a mistake, and that she should have made her way home alone.

Even little Katie failed to arouse her and to make her happy; the child was only a part of the general perplexity and contradiction, a responsibility which troubled without inspiring her to effort. She felt vaguely that her husband's probable wishes were not sufficiently considered in the little girl's education; she knew instinctively that Susie had no true appreciation of Henry Dilworth, and that it was not right or fair to leave the management of his daughter entirely in her hands.

But she was too listless to interfere. As her despondency increased her energies flagged more and more, and she suffered from a corresponding failure in health. This seemed to her sisters only a temporary weakness, from which she would recover as she had recovered many times before. The change was too gradual to be alarming, and excited little attention in one who had been so long regarded as an invalid.

In the sixth year of little Kate's existence there occurred a blank of many months in the Australian correspondence. Henry Dilworth had accepted the command of an important exploring expedition, which took him far out of the regions of mails. For a long period, therefore, his wife received no letters from him; and, in her increasing weakness, she fretted over this disappointment strangely. She was at first anxious about her husband, afterwards about herself; and she repeated many times to her sisters, "I shall never see him again, I know."

They laughed at her fears ; and when news came of Henry Dilworth's safe arrival in civilized regions, they expected an immediate return to cheerfulness on the part of his wife. But she persisted in repeating, "I shall never see him again, I know."

She wrote to him in this strain, complaining with some passion of his long absence, as if, indeed, he had remained away against her wish.

"I am very ill, though they won't believe it," she wrote, "and I shall die without seeing you, I know. Why don't you come home ? Why did you ever go away ? or why did you marry me at all ? I have not been happy, though they tell me I have. I don't think I could have borne it so long, but it was good for the little girl. I don't want her to be unhappy like me. I don't want her to know that any one can be so unhappy. I didn't—before I left home. And now I want to see you before I die. You will talk to me, and make me not

afraid. The others won't hear of it. They tell me I shall get better; and I am too tired to argue. I want some one to believe me without. You must come.

“AGNES.”

This letter, with its passionate reproach, its pitiful appeal, its ungrateful forgetfulness of all her husband's silent abnegation, was a strange reopening of the closed past.

The next vessel which left Australia for England took Henry Dilworth back to his wife.

END OF VOL. I.

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